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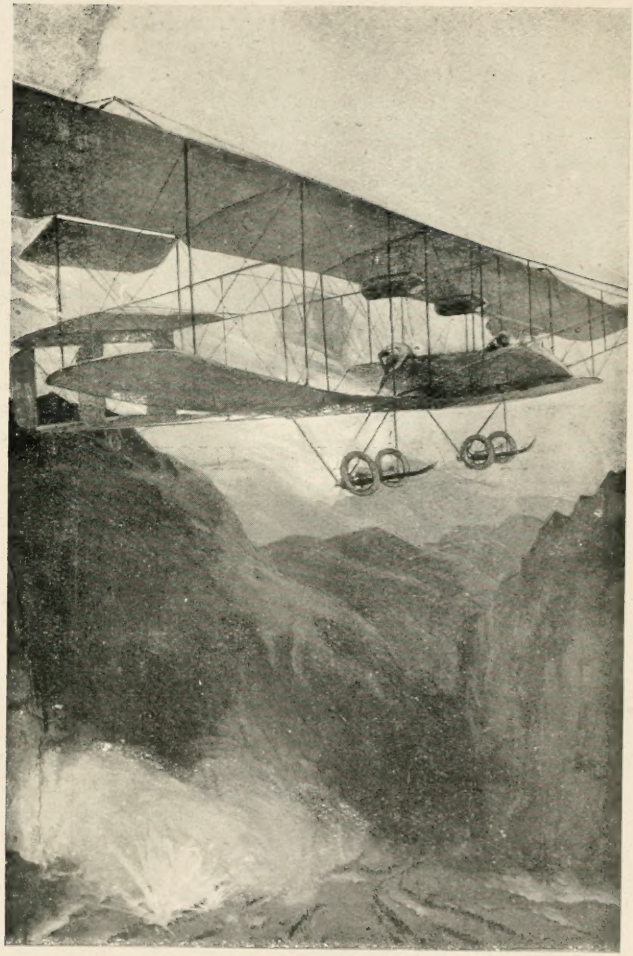
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A BALKAN PRINCE

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THE SKIRMISH.

A Balkan Prince

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

LONDON
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A BALKAN PRINCE

CHAPTER I

THE HOLY STONE OF VOUSIC

UNWILLING to betray the excitement which worked in his lean face, Sergius got up from his chair by the writing-table and crossed over to the window. For some moments he stood staring down over the steep, bright confusion of roofs and streets and terraces which formed his beloved city of Belgrade. The fingers with which he pulled at his moustache trembled a little. At last he turned back to the table and sat down again.

"Then, the fact is, we will be able to save Servia," said he, quietly. He looked at his visitor with a smile, but a kind of exultation burned in his eyes.

Prince Sergius Charles de Plamenac, known to his intimates as Serge Ivanovich, had schooled himself to curb the impetuosities of his Serb temperament. Educated in England, at Harrow and Oxford, and afterwards a graduate of the mining-camps of Nevada and Nome, he prided himself upon his imperturbability. But just at this moment he was near losing it. From the sheet of dark green blotting-paper beside him, he picked up a

great white stone—water-white, with fleeting, ineffable tints of palest rose—turned it slowly between his fingers, then dropped it among the litter of pens, pencils, sealing-wax and postage stamps which occupied the tray beside his big bronze ink-well. The gong of the clock on the mantelpiece chimed the half hour and he stared at it intently for a moment as if it were something he had never seen before. When the tones had quite died away he opened a cigarette box and abstractedly pushed it over to his companion.

"Yes, my friend," he repeated, "I think we will be able to really do something, now! Have a cigarette."

The Prince's visitor was a man not over middle height, but of that gaunt, big-boned, loose-jointed type of frame which suggests great stature. He was dressed in the snuff-brown homespun short jacket, gaudy-coloured loose shirt, and shrunken-legged brown homespun trousers of a Servian peasant farmer. But he had an elusive air of being at home in many garbs; and his face—hard, keen, vigilant, proud, swarthy, and fiercely moustached, suggested that of a masterful bandit who took no discredit of his calling. He chose a cigarette with deliberation, as if seeking to emulate Plamenac's coolness. He started to light it; but his hand shook, and he threw down the match impatiently. The fire in his heart surged up into his eyes; and the face of a bandit was transfigured to the face of the enthusiast.

"I knew it, Serge Ivanovich!" he cried. "Of course I knew that would be your first thought, the thought of Servia. And so I trusted you. And I was right. I hear it in your voice. I see it in your eyes. I——" and checking himself abruptly he lighted his cigarette.

"And how should you *not* have trusted me, Gregory Nicolaievich?" demanded the Prince. "Would *I* have hesitated about trusting *you*, think you? We've known each other well enough, surely, and trusted each other well enough, in the old bloody days in the mountains!"

Gregory sprang to his feet and began restlessly pacing up and down the room.

"I never distrusted you, Serge Ivanovich," he declared, "or I should not have been here. I knew you were honest, and had the truth in your lips. And I knew you were Serb to the last breath, in spite of your Austrian grandfather. But the best of men may grow sluggish and selfish. Their hearts, if not their heads, may forget, far away in the laughing world. And the fate of a little people, a poverty-stricken little people surrounded by the wolves, *might* come to seem in their eyes a little, far off thing."

"I have been far away, quite true—and in the gay world—that's true also. But I have not been forgetting—not for one moment have I forgotten, my Gregory," answered the Prince, quietly. "I have been waiting—getting ready—for what must come. Now, I

think I begin to see how it will come. It is our poverty that has made it impossible for Austria to so divide us and throttle us."

Gregory opened and shut his hands savagely, as if he felt them clutching at an Austrian throat.

"It's the money that will do it," he muttered. "When we've all the money we want —for guns, rifles, horses, fortifications, gunboats on the river; when we can pour arms and supplies into Montenegro; when we can arm and drill our brothers from the stolen provinces, from Old Servia, from the North; when we can make it worth while for Bulgaria and Greece to forget old grudges and ally themselves with us—then our rights will be given to us, because, with half a million fighting Serbs in the field, we can take them. It's the money will do it."

Prince Sergius stood up.

"And it is you, my friend, who will have done it," he said solemnly. Then he sat down again, and let his eyes wander over a map of the Balkan States which lay open on the table.

"No," answered the mountaineer, "it is only that I have been so fortunate as to find the treasure. Beyond that I am powerless. It is for you, Serge Ivanovich, to find the way to secure it, to get it into Servia—or better, into the secret places of the Black Mountain. And then, it is for you to find out how to turn it into gold, into power—to see that it be not too shamelessly eaten into by the rats of

office. I know how little *I* can do. I'm a mere free lance and leader of outlaws. What more can I do than help carry out what you may plan? I know the hills and the thickets, and I know the hearts of the people. But you know the world."

Prince Sergius turned to the pen tray. He picked up the great diamond, and scrutinized it once more.

"How much is it worth, do you think?" asked Gregory.

The Prince looked doubtful.

"Five hundred thousand francs, perhaps! More likely, twice as much!" he hazarded at length.

"There are a hundred more as fine," said Gregory—"and of littler ones, oh, more than I could take the time to count. Here's all I thought it wise to bring with me!" And emptying his beaded tobacco-pouch on the green blotter before Prince Sergius, he picked out of the tobacco a great stone of an elusive bluish tint, subtle and entrancing as the blue that flames in the depths of a crevice in clear ice. This he laid in Plamenac's hand. Then, spreading the tobacco with his lean fingers—which were not the fingers of a worker in the fields—he gathered out five smaller stones, all colourless as dew. These he bunched carelessly upon the blotter.

Exquisite as they were, Prince Sergius did not glance at them. He was absorbed in study of the great jewel in his palm. His gaze seemed to sink into the heart of it, and there

unravel visions of the renewed glory of his race. Deep within those cerulean gleams he saw the ancient splendours of the Servian Empire, dead since the black day of Kossovo five hundred years ago, now re-awaking, bursting into new splendour.

"Is it equal to the other?" asked Gregory.

"Equal to it!" murmured the Prince, looking up as if half-dazed. "It is priceless! Priceless!" He was silent for a moment. Then he muttered, "The hand of God is in it!"

"Of course, the hand of God is in it, Serge Ivanovich," responded the outlaw, with a touch of impatience at what seemed to his robust faith so obvious a remark. "How else, do you think, would I have found what so many have looked for in vain during these five hundred years? How else, when I had found it, would it have come into my heart to guess the meaning of the cleft in the stone, how else would I have had the courage to do what seemed a sacrilege—to split open such a sacred thing as the Holy Stone of Vousic?"

"Surely, you are right. Your heart told you that however holy was the Stone of Vousic—which, so far, to be sure, had never done much for Servia!—the Cause of our Country was holier. For that cause, my Gregory, you were ready to dare a sacrilege—and so the stone gave up its secret to you. You tore the secret from its heart. And so the ancient tradition may come to be fulfilled. The Holy Stone may indeed prove to be the salvation of

the Serb—and not only of the Serb, but of Greek and Bulgar as well—if only we are faithful enough, and brave enough, and prudent enough. But why did you not bring more of the gems with you?"

"Would *that* have been being 'prudent enough,' my Prince?" demanded the outlaw. "Remember, the treasure lies far within the borders of Austria. I needn't remind you that I am not unknown, or uninteresting, to the Austrian police and their spies. It's the easiest thing in the world to pick a quarrel with some people. Imagine me searched, and diamonds to the value of a king's ransom found in my tobacco-pouch! Imagine it, Serge Ivanovich. Would anything have ever got to Servia? Would not the very mountains of Slavonia—seeing that I was on my way from that district—have been turned upside down, to find the source of those stones?"

"True enough!" agreed Prince Sergius. "But that brings us to another point. You found them. Why may not some one else find them too, while we are planning how to get possession?"

"They are well hidden," said Gregory. "I have divided them into two lots, to be the safer, and have buried them under the muck of a hog-pen. They are well-guarded. The swine of old Maria Petrovich are rooting and wallowing over them."

Prince Sergius sprang to his feet, laughing heartily. Half offended, half reproachful, the outlaw stared at him.

"Could I have found a safer place, Serge Ivanovich?" he demanded stiffly.

The Prince caught him by the shoulders and shook him.

"No, a thousand times no, Gregory!" he exclaimed. "As usual, you have done exactly the right thing. You are the most unerringly correct person in the world—which is surely amazing in a bandit, an outlaw. You outrage all the proprieties of romance, my Gregory."

"But I don't see what you are laughing at, Serge Ivanovich," persisted the other, only half mollified.

"Well, you see," explained the Prince, "you've supplied just the human touch which was needed to make this thing quite real. The whole affair has been like a fairy tale, up to this point. It was all just a little bit too magnificent to be true—and too miraculous, also, to be true. Now, I *feel* it to be true. I know your word is as pure gold, my Gregory. But there was the chance that we were both crazy, or dreaming, or hypnotized. Now, I can see those hogs, rooting and wallowing and squealing and grunting, above the hope of Servia! How appropriate the hiding-place! How fit the guardians! For Servia lives by her pigs." And he laughed again, joyously as a boy.

Gregory looked more offended than ever.

"Still——" he began.

But Prince Sergius interrupted him, at the

same time pushing him into his chair and handing him a fresh cigarette.

"You see, Gregory," he explained, "we were in danger of getting just a trifle too high-strung over this affair. And that's what we must not let ourselves do. Cool, steady common sense is what we've got to depend on. We know each other, you and I, and we don't have to do any bragging about what we are ready to face for the Cause. There's plenty of devotion. What we've got to do is keep cool, and think straight, and see clear, and be as practical and deliberate as if we were going to start a pig-farm. The fate of our race, and perhaps of more thrones than one, is in our hands, my friend. *Wisdom* is what we've got to cultivate—wisdom and sanity. To be *quite* sane and wise, one must be able to laugh on occasion. It keeps the cobwebs out of the brain. I *wish,* now, my Gregory, you could see not only how clever, but at the same time how funny it was of you, to leave the Holy Stone, and all the hope of Servia, under the guardianship of Mother Maria's pigs."

"I see, my Prince!" responded Gregory, in a tone which showed that, though he did not see at all, he was nevertheless entirely mollified. "I suppose now, when you come to think of it, pigs *are* amusing brutes, but when you've seen such a thundering lot of them as I have you——"

There came a tap at the door, and he stopped in the middle of his sentence.

Prince Sergius swept diamonds and tobacco together into the beaded pouch, drew the cord tight, and said "Come in," impatiently.

A lad, the son of his concierge, who ran errands for him, approached with a card held deferentially between his finger-tips. Seeing the frown of annoyance on his patron's face, he hesitated and began to stammer excuses.

"The gentleman was very pressing, sir," he began. "He wouldn't believe me when I said you——"

But as he spoke the Prince had glanced at the card. His face cleared.

"Show him up at once," he commanded.

As the boy, greatly relieved, darted away without finishing his apology, Prince Sergius turned shining eyes upon his companion.

"There's not a man in the world," he declared, "whom I'd rather see come in at this very moment, Gregory."

"Who is he?" demanded the mountaineer, in a tone of jealous suspicion.

"A friend of mine—a lover of the Serbs—whom I can trust as I trust you, Gregory."

But the cloud remained on the face of Gregory Nicolaievich.

"Captain Andrews—of the British Army," continued Prince Sergius. "Here he comes. Be civil to him, Gregory."

But the cloud on the outlaw's face had lifted.

"They don't make spies of Englishmen," he muttered with relief.

CHAPTER II

AND HOW TO FIND IT

A TALL figure in brown tweeds entered, and strode across the room with long, cavalry strides. His light brown hair was cropped close, his long, square-jawed, weather-reddened face was covered with tiny wrinkles, his piercing, light-blue eyes looked out from under shaggy, sandy-coloured eyebrows with a gaze that was frank, fearless and self-contained. His mouth, clean-shaven, was firm to obstinacy, and reticent as his eyes were candid. Prince Sergius came forward eagerly to meet him; while Gregory, who had risen as he entered, remained standing close by the table, the fingers of his right hand moving nervously as if they longed to clutch the precious tobacco-pouch which lay close by on the blotter.

"Jove! But this is luck, old chap, to catch you here in Belgrade. I was afraid I'd find you flown," exclaimed Andrews, in English.

"I call it more than luck, Bob! You were the very man I was wanting to see," answered the Prince, in Servian. "But let me introduce my friend, Captain Andrews—Mr Gregory Nicolaievich—a captain also, though of slightly irregular commission."

The Englishman gave the Servian a civil, but coolly appraising glance, and the two men bowed stiffly to each other, with inarticulate murmurs that sounded vaguely polite.

"My very old and tried friend and companion-in-arms," continued the Prince, with significant emphasis.

A sunny smile broke over the Englishman's face, softening it to boyishness, and his hand went out heartily to the rough-looking stranger.

"The tried friends of Prince Sergius are the kind of men above all others that I want to know," he exclaimed warmly, in good Servian.

Gregory took the proffered hand, but with frigid ceremony. His over-sensitive pride had been ruffled by that first searching appraisal of the Englishman's cool eyes. He made as if to go. He picked up his tobacco-pouch, but dropped it again instantly upon the blotter, and stretched out his hand, with its long, well-kept fingers, for his peasant cap, which lay on the back of the desk. The Englishman's keen eye took note of those fingers, so little in keeping with the garb of their owner.

"Well, I'll bid you good day, Captain Andrews," he said. "And I'll see you again this evening, Serge Ivanovich, about ten o'clock, if you'll be in then. Or at eight to-morrow morning, if that will suit you better."

"Man!" exclaimed the Prince impatiently, "You are as suspicious as a cat. You men of the Black Mountain are as touchy as porcupines. You can't be running off like that, Gregory Nicolaievich. You're needed here—and right now, not to-night at ten o'clock, nor yet to-morrow morning." And with intimate affection he pulled Gregory down into the nearest chair.

As he repeated the name of Gregory Nicolaievich, the Englishman looked up sharply. It was evident he had not caught it when he was introduced. His blue eyes danced, and he hoisted his long length—which had just subsided into an arm-chair—once more to its full height.

"Really!" he exclaimed, "I didn't catch your name, you know, first shot. Hope you'll pardon my stupidity. But if you're the Gregory Nicolaievich those Austrian rascals down in Bosnia are looking for so anxiously, I'm much honoured. I've just come up—not without troubles of my own—from Sarajevo. I'd like to shake hands with you again, Captain Gregory."

The Montenegrin's white teeth flashed under his moustache in a gratified smile, and his hand shot out impulsively.

"Yes, the Austrians do me the honour to interest themselves in me," he assented. "And I can imagine they look on you, captain, with some distrust. Prince Sergius tells me you are with us."

"Indeed, yes, I am with you!" responded

the Englishman simply. "But I'm afraid, Captain Gregory, I'm not going to see as much of you, just now, as I would wish. It is not only in Bosnia that the Austrians are looking for you. It is right here in Belgrade, also; and right now. They're hot on the scent."

"Curse them!" said the Montenegrin. His eyes flamed, but he seemed by no means surprised at the intelligence. Prince Sergius, however, was more disturbed.

"What do you mean, Bob?" he demanded. "You've just arrived. How do *you* know so much already?"

"Well, you know, I was at the Prefecture just now, raising a row about some stuff I've had stolen since crossing the frontier. Of course, I was having a devil of a time to make myself understood, in a judicious mixture of English and French—because, as Captain Gregory doubtless perceives, I don't know a word of Servian! That being so obviously and naturally the case, the agent of the Austrian minister, who came in while I was there and appeared to be in a great hurry, talked quite frankly before me. He was demanding the immediate arrest and extradition of one Gregory Nicolaievich, for the shooting of an Austrian official of some sort, somewhere on the other side of the river. I must confess that the *description* of this guilty personage did not exactly tally with your present appearance, Captain Gregory. But——"

"I have several appearances," interrupted

the Montenegrin, smiling. "I find it advisable at times!"

"Quite so!" agreed the Englishman. "Well, it appeared that the Prefect was most unwilling to be convinced that it was his duty to arrest you, but the Austrian, as usual, was obstinate, and from the strictly legal point of view, captain, he seemed to me to have a case! The Prefect had to yield, which he did with a very bad grace and as much delay as possible. But procrastinate as he may, the warrant is doubtless out by this time—and we may be sure our Austrian friends will let no grass grow under their feet. They seem to want you badly—and I should judge that all the time you've got is none too much, captain. If I can be of service, please command me absolutely."

"Is it something new, Gregory?" demanded Prince Sergius, with a trace of anxiety in his voice. "It's doubly necessary to be prudent, just now, surely!"

The mountaineer gave a little laugh of satisfaction.

"It was *quite* unavoidable, believe me, Serge Ivanovich," he answered. "There were several of them, and they permitted themselves to be too inquisitive. I was a little abrupt perhaps—but if I had not been so, they would have found—what it was necessary they should not find. And I should not have been here. They wanted to search me for letters, documents of any kind, you see. And that means a minute search!

I told you there were difficulties to be considered when things were across the river!"

"If they track you here, my Gregory," said Sergius, "I've no doubt you have some way of escape ready. But it might lead to complications, to more suspicions where *I* am concerned. And suspicions would be inconvenient. I crave obscurity now, for some time on."

"Oh," said the Montenegrin easily, "they've been thrown off my track for a while. They probably won't know I've come here at all. There are plenty of backyards in Belgrade; and Michael, downstairs, is a friend. I came by the backyard route, and I'll go that way. When I let them pick up my trail again it will be a long way from the street where Prince Sergius lodges."

"It's as good as underground passages!" ejaculated the Englishman. "When I was a boy, I thought there was nothing like underground passages; and by Jove, they've got the most ridiculous fascination for me even yet."

"We fellows of the bush, we've got to have them everywhere, or something like them, Captain Andrews," assented the outlaw. "But now, my Prince, I think I'd better be getting away. I didn't really imagine the enemy would be quite so hot on my heels."

He rose, and looked at Prince Sergius significantly.

"I'm in the way, maybe!" said the

Englishman, smiling, and rising also. "I'll step out till you two are through."

"Not a bit of it. You're needed right here, Bob," insisted the Prince. And turning to the Montenegrin, he explained—"Andrews is in it, Gregory. He's the man I've had in my eye as *the* one we need, from the moment you opened your mouth to me about this affair. I answer for him. We can trust him with both our heads, as well as with what is far more precious."

The fiery, greenish-brown eyes of the Montenegrin met, and plunged deep into, the calm blue ones of the Englishman. They seemed satisfied with the result of their expedition.

"The word of Prince Sergius, of course, would be enough of itself for me," said Gregory. "But allow me to add, captain, that I do not find it difficult to trust an Englishman."

Then he selected a folded scrap of paper from several that were in his pocket, and spread it out on the blotter before Prince Sergius, at the same time motioning the Englishman that he should inspect it also.

"In case of it's falling into wrong hands," said he, "you'll see that I have put down nothing that could indicate the part of the world it refers to. It might be any land where oaks and pines will grow. For the locality and how to get there, you must trust to your memory. I'll go over that again, that you may see you have it right, and that

Captain Andrews, also, may make note of it. From Pravnitza, the high road, such as it is, runs nearly north-east about eighteen miles till it strikes the little village of Slovich. A bridle-path leading up the hill from the back of the village takes you to old Maria Petrovich's cabin—a good five miles from the village, in the hollow behind the ridge. That square at the foot of the map is Mother Maria's cabin—better not give it any name! She lives there with her son, a sturdy lump without more wits than enough to watch a hog-wallow, but honest and faithful. The country about there is open, and reasonably level, with woods to east and north, about half a mile distant. Here and there you'll see a big oak—maybe six or eight in all. But there's only one other tree—the pine marked in the map. Straight north from Mother Maria's cabin, is a curious looking rock like a beast crouching. There you see it. The only trees near are the ones I've marked: you can't by any possibility go wrong. Well, if you sight off three lines, just as I've marked them here, at the two points of intersection you'll find what you're after. But they're messy places to dig, for that's where Mother Maria's hogs are penned at night, and she keeps a slew of them. Have you got it all straight now in your mind?"

Prince Sergius eyed the rude diagram for a moment, then handed it over to the Englishman.

"Yes, Gregory," said he, "I've got it all. I've got it photographed indelibly on my memory, directions, diagram, and all. And I know of no safer place to keep this paper itself than in the inviolable pocket of our

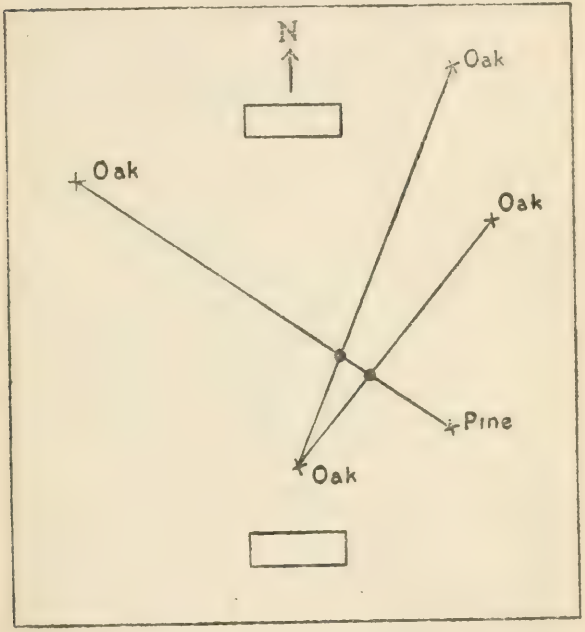


DIAGRAM SHOWING HOW TO FIND THE STONES.

methodical Englishman friend here. He'll never mislay it. And all the Continental Powers won't be able to take it from him."

"Good," said the Montenegrin.

Andrews grinned happily, as if contemplating himself in a scrimmage with the Archduke Ferdinand.

"Meantime," continued Prince Sergius, "where shall I be able to find you? I take it you'll be getting away from Belgrade at once. Of course? And we must not make any hasty move, since you say the stuff is safe where it is. The thing will take a lot of planning, patient planning and preparation, if there's to be no risk of a slip-up at the last moment."

"All that is what I've come to you for, Serge Ivanovich," said the mountaineer. "Now it's in your hands—the destiny of our people. I'm off to-night. And I'm going straight to Niksich. A letter enclosed to Jacob Baki—your old gossip, the little tailor by the corner of the church—will get me."

"All right," said Sergius. "And I'll send for you the moment things are ripe for a move. Meanwhile, don't you want your tobacco-pouch?"

The outlaw laughed. "I'd like the *pouch!*" he agreed "It's a keepsake. But I don't need the tobacco, it would be very inconvenient for me, and not much use in Niksich just at present. I don't object to a few gold pieces, however, if you have them by you. I'm a little short for the journey."

Prince Sergius picked up the beaded pouch, opened it, and held it poised above the blotter.

"Bob," said he, "there are singular

virtues, you'll observe, in this Servian tobacco as Gregory carries it."

He emptied the tobacco and spread it out on the green blotting paper.

"*By* Jove!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Now I see something of what you two chaps have been driving at all this time."

The tobacco was chiefly diamonds, immense and radiant gems.

He picked up a great ice-blue stone, and examined it with the eyes of a connoisseur, while his companions watched his face for the verdict. Laying it down among the fragrant tobacco without a word, he took up a faintly rosy gem, and subjected it to a like scrutiny. Then he handed it over to Prince Sergius.

"Those two stones," said he, "would make the Great Mogul himself sit up and take notice. He'd pawn his harem for them, and the harems of his subjects as well. Any more such where those came from?"

"Enough to engineer some considerable changes in the Balkans," answered Gregory.

"And *you'll* have your work cut out, Bob, helping us convert them into currency," said Prince Sergius. "One of the first things we do, we'll run up to Amsterdam, sell these baubles where we can get fair value, and put the cash in the Bank of Holland, where they mind their own business, and mind it well."

As he spoke he unlocked a little drawer in his desk, dropped the stones into it, and took out two Servian bank-notes with half a dozen Turkish gold pieces. These he handed over

to the Montenegrin, who thrust them carelessly into the pocket of his tight trousers.

"That's all I've got by me, my Gregory," said he. "But when more's needed, you always know where to reach me."

"I'll get away now!" said Gregory, giving his right hand to Andrews, his left to Prince Sergius, with a look and manner that made the act almost a sacrament. The most solemn of pledges, of dedications, were in their hearts; but there seemed no need of words.

"Safe journey, captain!" was all the Englishman said. But Sergius, the intensity of his excitement threatening to break through the mask of his self-control, followed the outlaw to the door, clutching his arm with both hands, and seeming to struggle with emotions which he was unwilling to let out. All he said, at last, was the one thing most obvious:

"I can't quite believe it yet, Gregory."

As he spoke, there came a sound of voices, sudden but dim, from below stairs. The Montenegrin's hand was already on the door knob. He stiffened like a listening grouse, turned away, and stepped up to one of the great panels of wainscoting beside the chimney. With the quiet words: "I know this house well. Here is one of the reasons why I got you to take these rooms"—he reached up and pushed hard on the top of the panel. It opened inwards, a little stiffly, showing a very narrow passage faintly lighted from the roof.

"This is the safest way for me, Serge Ivanovich." And stepping within, he closed the panel behind him with a click.

Prince Sergius turned back into the room with an air of discontent.

"*That* makes it more unreal than ever, Bob!" he grumbled. "It's too much like make-believe. I wish you'd kick me."

"A bit melodramatic, if you like," agreed Andrews, "but after all, since the passage was there, it was only the soundest common sense for him to make use of it. Don't be unreasonable, Serge. Listen to that row downstairs."

What was evidently an excited discussion went on for some minutes.

"Michael's keeping them in play," muttered the Prince.

"I fancy our bandit friend can take quite good care of himself," remarked the Englishman, in a tone of joyous appreciation.

The alarming murmurs below stairs came to an end.

"Michael's probably got them searching the cellar," said Prince Sergius.

"Will they look in here?" asked Andrews.

"If they do, they'll be very civil about it, I assure you," answered the Prince, grimly. "But I've really no objection. I think, however, I'll leave it to Michael to do the honours here, as well as in the cellar. Save annoyance!"

He unlocked the little drawer, took out the diamonds, sealed them in an envelope, and

put them in his pocket. "Let's get out, Bob," he continued. "Let's get down to the 'Danilo' and look at some real waiters—German waiters—and drink a real whisky-and-soda."

"You'd better take beer and a Limburger sandwich, old chap," suggested the Englishman, elongating himself lazily from the depth of his chair. "That'll convince you you're not in a Jack-and-the-Beanstalk dream. For myself, I *like* fairy stories."

CHAPTER III

THE TERRACE OF THE CAFÉ DANILO

THE Café Danilo was high up on the hillside; and its terrace, where Prince Sergius and Captain Andrews sat at their little table, gave a clear view of the city and the river.

Belgrade endeavours—without too laborious effort or too conspicuous success—to emulate the air of a metropolis, i.e. of Paris, the words Parisian and metropolitan being synonymous to the Servian eye. Belgrade's "world," therefore, of an afternoon, is in the cafés, cheerfully to see and to be seen.

The Café Danilo is the smartest in Belgrade; and the sparkling, excitable throng was frivolous enough, customary enough, material enough, to bring Prince Sergius back, as he desired, to the realities of life.

For Prince Sergius was born to this throng, this excitable Balkan atmosphere, this temperament, this valorous and visionary White City on the Hill. His visits to Belgrade were frequent, though his Servian estate lay far to the south, on a branch of the Morava, beyond the ancient city of Nisch. His eyes were well familiarized to the scene which lay spread out below him in the afternoon sunshine. But to the Englishman, that scene was

altogether in keeping with the fairy-tale he had just been listening to in the Prince's rooms, and in which he now found himself, to his unqualified delight, pledged to play no unimportant part. His face was as impassive, serious almost to grimness, as ever; but his blue eyes gleamed with keen relish as they roamed over the clean, bright city, with its new-widened streets, and its low, gardened houses. Everywhere the streets were dotted with the smart Servian uniforms, the spotless white jackets seeming to sparkle above the sharp contrast of the blood-red trousers. Far down, along the curving shore of the great river, the quays of the city were not so busy as a lover of Servia might have wished; for the chief product of the country is pork—extremely good, acorn-fed pork—and Belgrade is not yet an important centre of industry. But importance was lent to the quays by the picture of a large boat swinging in to one of them—a splendid passenger steamer of the line which plies between Budapest and Rustchuk. Across the broad water, close to the northern shore, moved the squat, black forms of two monitors, of the Austrian river fleet, thrusting their way up toward Semlin against the massive tide of Father Danube.

As his eyes rested on these craft, and he slowly realized their significance, a contented smile broke over Andrews' lips. There was the concrete symbol of the force, sinister and tremendous, which he had set himself to

thwart—he, a roving Englishman, in alliance with a titled Servian idler, a Montenegrin outlaw, and a handful of white stones alleged to be hidden in a hog-yard! The more he dwelt upon it, the broader grew his smile; till presently the voice of Sergius recalled him to his immediate surroundings.

"What is it you are grinning about, Bob? What do you see out there so amusing?"

"Don't you see those two monitors off there by the north bank?" demanded Andrews.

"Yes, damn them!" assented the Prince.

"We *will*, old chap! That's why I'm grinning!" explained Andrews lucidly.

"Ah, yes, of course, to be sure!" agreed Sergius, tugging at his moustache to disguise the expression which leapt into his face. "But, by the way," he continued in a lower voice, "I fancy we'd better regard our subjects of conversation as strictly limited, while we're here, even though we are talking English. There are many Greeks who come here. And where the Greeks come, you have all languages."

"And lovely women!" added Andrews. "See those two yonder. They're both Greeks, I take it. Off there to your right, with two men, one a Servian officer with a decoration."

Plamenac turned his head.

"Yes!" he assented promptly, "they *are* both beautiful. But only one of them is a Greek. The one furthest from us, drinking

coffee—she's the wife of the Greek Consul here, and the civilian is her husband. The other—and the more enchanting of the two, to my mind—is a Frenchwoman, a true Parisienne, with a fondness for English customs. You see she is drinking tea, like yourself. She's Madame de L'Orme, the wife of the biggest wine-merchant here—and has sundry and various good gentlemen—of whom, thank God, I'm not one—at her small, American-shod feet."

At this moment Madame de L'Orme turned slightly, and her eyes met Plamenac's. A smile of emphatic favour irradiated her face, and she bowed conspicuously. Prince Sergius returned the greeting somewhat eagerly.

"If you're *not* one of them, you jolly well ought to be ashamed of yourself!" muttered Andrews. "Introduce me!"

"Not much!" breathed the Prince with decision. "She's too enchanting for a candid soul like you, Bob. And you've something else to think about."

At this moment, apparently after a word from the Frenchwoman, the Servian officer turned half round in his chair and saluted the Prince. With marked punctiliousness, and a face like a mask, Plamenac acknowledged the salute.

"You don't like him," murmured Andrews.

"I have as little intercourse as possible," answered the Prince under his breath, and apparently quite occupied in lighting his

cigarette, "as little as is politic—with the wearers of that particular decoration."

On the Servian officer's breast glittered a Maltese Cross of white enamel, with golden rays flashing from its centre.

"Ah!" muttered Andrews. "So!" Then he let his eyes wonder out over the roofs, with careful indifference. "I've seen several like that, already, here. And I can't place it. The last time I was here was in 1902—in the days of Alexander and Draga. I saw none of these white-and-gold crosses then."

"For the best of all reasons!" said the Prince dryly. "I was no admirer of the peasant dynasty of the Obrenoviches, you may be sure. But—well, there are other subjects, as we agreed! The best way I can explain to you is by saying that the officer there is Major X——! I see you understand. Also" —and here his voice became almost inaudible, while he bent over his glass to remove an imaginary speck—"also, I would have spat upon that decoration long ago, if I had not loved Servia too well to put obstacles in the way of my being useful to her."

"Well, cheer up, old chap!" rejoined Andrews, enigmatically. "There are a good many holes in the colander, you know!"

Which seemingly irrelevant suggestion appeared, indeed, to cheer Prince Sergius greatly. The gloom vanished from his face.

For some minutes the two men sat in silence, smoking diligently. Conversation

between them was at a discount, their minds being filled to the brim with that of which it was inexpedient to speak. At length, along a street below them, in full view, passed an open carriage, in which sat a spare, grey-faced, tired-looking man. In spite of his brilliant escort, he had the air of being surrounded by a solitude. Andrews leaned a little forward, studying the grey-faced man with interest. It was his first view of King Peter Karageorgevich of Servia. Then he turned to the Prince, with a faint interrogatory lifting of the eyebrows.

Plamenac's face was a mask. But to the Englishman's ear, gliding under the buzz of voices, came the low breathed words: "Karageorgevich!* Obrenovich! Both tarred with the same brush. Alas! But he's making a brave fight to live it down."

* When the Servian Empire, which at its height comprised the greater part of the Balkan peninsula, from the Danube to the Gulf of Corinth, was shattered by the Turks on the field of Kossovo in 1389, most of the old Servian nobility perished in the ruins. Of the remnant, all but a handful fled into the fastnesses of Montenegro. When, in the nineteenth century, after nearly five hundred years of bondage, the Serbs rose against their oppressors, they were led by two peasant chiefs, Karageorge and Milosh Obrenovich. Both won victories for Servia. Both carried her far toward freedom. But it was Karageorge who most greatly served his country. When, at length, there was once more a Servia to rule over, Obrenovich, that he might rule, had Karageorge murdered in his sleep. That was in 1817. The house of Obrenovich held the throne till 1842, when it was expelled, and a Karageorgevich was called in. He ruled till 1858, when the fickle people deposed him and recalled the Obrenovich dynasty. Michael Obrenovich ruled well, till he was murdered, in 1868, by adherents of Prince Peter Karageorgevich. The plot to overturn the

Just then some scraps of excited conversation floated to them from the next table. Two German travellers had a copy of the Berlin *Lokal Anzeiger* between them, and were eagerly discussing (for this was in September, 1909) the flights of Orville Wright at Johannisthal. They were enthusiastic over the heights to which he had flown; but what seemed to impress them most was his flight with their Crown Prince as passenger. That settled the matter. If the Kaiser could trust his heir, the adored of all Germany, to that fragile and flickering machine of the American bird-man, then of a surety was the conquest of the air achieved. From this feat of Orville Wright's they passed to that splendid piece of audacity of Latham's, when he flew, in his monoplane, from Johannisthal to the Tempelhof field, high over the roofs and steeples of Berlin. To them this seemed more convincing than Blériot's flight across the English Channel—for had it not taken place in Germany, and was it not, therefore, a fact indisputable, a bed-rock fact, on which they might proceed to build as they would?

Obrenovich dynasty failed, however, and the Karageorges were exiled from Servia. Another plot, in 1903, was successful. The young king, Alexander Obrenovich, and his queen were murdered with savagery. Once more a Karageorgevich sat upon the unstable throne of Servia; and the assassins who had placed him there he rewarded with the decoration of a cross of white and gold. In the meantime, while these Kings of Servia were cutting each other's throats, in the kindred Serb state of Montenegro, the unconquered, was ruling a line of wise and able princes, the Petrovics of Niegus. To this line belongs the poet-king, Nicholas I, who now holds the mountain throne.

In spite of themselves, shamelessly, and as if by a mutual understanding, Plamenac and the Englishman listened to this conversation —the latter with a strained intensity, since he was not at ease with his German. Presently they looked at each other, as if to say, "*There's* a subject we can talk about." The interchange of glances said even more than that. For, as if the tremendous matter that gripped their minds had endowed them with new keenness of intuition, the thought that flashed upon them simultaneously was— "There's the subject that we *must* talk about!" And straightway it seemed to both that explanation would be superfluous. Plamenac beckoned to a waiter.

"Kindly bring me a copy of yesterday's *Morgenblätter,* if you can find one," said he.

The waiter, a well-trained and serviceable German (for the Servians of his class think it beneath their dignity to be waiters), hurried off to find the great Vienna journal.

"I've been intensely interested in this thing for months," said Prince Sergius, as the waiter brought the journal and laid it on the table before him.

"So have I," said Andrews.

"Also," went on the Prince, "I've been studying the subject, theoretically; and at the same time practising with home-made gliders, of various patterns, in those open, rolling pasture fields behind the house, down yonder at M'latza."

"Jolly place for it!" agreed Andrews.

"And, as I remember it, you've got a stretch of level in front, along the river, that would be ripping for a sort of private aviation ground, if you should think of wanting such a thing."

He spoke in an undertone; but Prince Sergius lowered his eyelids, and ignored the suggestion.

"I had planned to get up to Rheims," he continued, "for the Aviation Week. But some unexpected business here kept me. I was disappointed."

He unfolded the paper as he spoke, and it opened to a rough but thrilling cut of Hubert Latham, in his machine, soaring over the Berlin house-roofs.

"*I* was there!" said Andrews. "It was an eye-opener, I can tell you."

With unconcealed eagerness the two bent over the paper.

"Our German friends at the next table are unquestionably right," spoke the Englishman again. "The aeroplane has arrived."

"Bob!" said Sergius in a tone of decision, looking up suddenly, and glancing around the terrace.

"Yes, old chap?"

"The Aviation Fortnight at Juvisy begins on the 7th. We must be there! And the Exhibition in the Grand Palais will be on at the same time. We've got to see that."

"Yes, old chap!" said the Englishman again, but this time in no voice of interrogation.

"Then——" began Prince Sergius, "but there's Madame de L'Orme signing to me to come over to her table. I see she won't be denied. Come along, Bob, and I'll present you, since we'll be leaving Belgrade at once. You'll have to shake hands with Major X——, to be sure! But you're not supposed to know, necessarily, what the white thing on his breast stands for."

"I want to meet her—but not so badly as all that!" replied Andrews. "I'll wait here, old chap. Get leave to bring me to call on her, when we come back from Paris."

CHAPTER IV

AT THE GRAND PALAIS

It was in the middle of the first week of October that Plamenac and Andrews arrived in Paris. They put up at one of the new and admirable hostelries, smart but quiet, just off the upper end of the Champs Élysées. All up and down the lovely vista of the Avenue, from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe, under a light-blue, ethereal sky, the trees were doing whimsical things, as if that abortive and disappointing summer of 1909 had thrown them out of all their calculations. From some the leaves were already dropping, reluctantly and prematurely, without having taken the trouble to first put on their autumn tints. On others—those which gave the time its due observance—the strong greens were changing to a bright, mottled admixture of rich bronzes, fine gamboge yellows, pallid golds, and smouldering rose-purples. Others again—certain of those horse-chestnuts whose part it is to make the Avenue the marvel of lavish blossom which it becomes in May—seemed utterly to have lost the run of the season. They were unfolding to the complaisant sun a new leafage, of spring's most tender green, and uplifting to him, like some belated and hurried offering,

a fresh array of those creamy, perfumed flower-spikes which belong only to the prime of the year.

As the two men walked down the Avenue toward the Grand Palais, where the Aëronautical Exhibition was being held, the fantastic element in the beauty of the scene fitted into their mood.

"Queer season!" muttered Prince Sergius, his eyes rapt. "Queer year altogether. I think, perhaps, Bob, that of all the years in the world's history so far, this will come to stand out as the *Annus Mirabilis.*"

"You see, old chap, you can't get out of Fairyland," replied Andrews, "whichever way you turn. You're caught in. And why should you want to get out? Bless me, I don't. Wonders *do* sometimes come true, you know. I'm often inclined to think that wonders are the truest things in the world."

"Or perhaps it is that truth is the greatest wonder in the world," retorted Prince Sergius idly.

Andrews ignored the remark.

"To think what kind of an exhibition it is that we are going to see!" he exclaimed. "An exhibition of flying machines! Shades of Icarus! Am I just an ordinary English gentleman, wearing trousers? I pinch my leg! Yes, it is even so! Buck up, Serge! All things are possible, particularly some things that certain people of importance don't expect!"

With that, turning to the right, they came

before the front of the Grand Palais. Beyond all question, it was still fairyland. Ahead of them shone the golden horsemen of the noble Alexander Third Bridge. Above them, against the sky, amidst the banners, ramped the chariot-horses of that imposing statuary which dominates the palace front. And then, the banners! Yellow, blue, white, red, everywhere—they wavered like sunlit butterflies in the thin, capricious breeze.

Once entered within the towering portals, their mood changed. Here, right before them, was the achievement of the ages. Not more wonderful was it when Prometheus gave man fire, than when man mastered the air. But, brought actually face to face with the marvel, in its various concrete forms, both the Servian and the Englishman felt their mood of the wonder-watcher slip from them. They were there, keen-eyed and practical, to *study* aeroplanes.

In the lofty glazed vault of the roof, floated, or seemed to float, some huge helpless gas-bubbles of spherical balloons, along with the immense, yellow, inflated cylinder of a successful "dirigible," the well-known Zodiac. These were a spectacle sufficiently imposing, sufficiently significant, in themselves. But neither Andrews nor Plamenac had eyes for them.

The vast main hall is traversed at mid-length by a short transept—short, but broad—and over the point of their intersection soars the splendid amplitude of the central

dome. The centre of the space immediately beneath the dome was occupied, as was its right, by that historic little monoplane, dingy and serviceable-looking, with which, on July 25 of that same year, Louis Blériot had made his immortal flight across the Channel. Poised on the rounded summit of a green, railed-in mound, at such a height that the slender wheels of its chains were about level with the tops of the spectators' heads, the spread of its dusky, weather-beaten wings presided, by unquestioned right, over the unparalleled significance and strangeness of the scene. So absolutely unparalleled, indeed, were the strangeness and the significance of the scene, that to apprehend them required some measure of imagination, instructed intelligence, and the awakened eye. Many of the spectators glanced at the array of aeroplanes with a vague indifference, as if they had been so many large go-carts or baby-carriages ; and seemed to find a much livelier interest in the balloons up in the roof, in the droll pneumatic manikins, and in a certain colossal negro-head with rolling eyes that blazed electric flame.

Around and around the triumphant Blériot walked Andrews and Prince Sergius, lingeringly, scrutinizing every detail of its simple and adequate design, paying it the tribute of silence. Then, returning to the point where they had entered, they glanced about to locate the other well-known machines. The posts of honour, of course, were the four

corners around the central throne of the Blériot. The corner at the right of the entrance was occupied by a huge, light-looking, exquisitely finished yellow-and-cream Farman biplane. Opposite the Farman brooded the heavy scarlet wings of the R.E.P. monoplane, with the silvery four-bladed propeller on its blunt nose. Across from the brooding, scarlet bird, hovered that bright, white dragon-fly of Latham's and Levavasseur's, the Antoinette monoplane. On the fourth corner, at the left of the entrance, was a white biplane with bluish frame-work, a strange, unstable-looking structure with very long twin propellers and an indescribable lift to all its lines, as if it were trembling to leap into the air. This was the famous American aeroplane of Wilbur and Orville Wright, the machine of unforgettable achievement, and of unforgettable tragedy.

"But where," demanded Andrews in a voice of discontent, "is Old Reliable, the Voisin? Surely *it* ought to have one of the posts of *highest* honour?"

"There!" replied Prince Sergius. "There it is over in the cross aisle, beyond the Antoinette. Type of modest worth, Bob!"

"I'm not sure but the Voisin has done about as much honest flying," continued Andrews, "as all the other machines put together. It ought to be yielding second place to none. It ought to be on the stand of the big red bird over there, which is so much

stronger in promise than in performance."

"You better go and blow up the hanging-committee, Bob!" laughed Plamenac. "This is where they hold the spring salons. Tell 'em they've got the best picture skied."

"And where's Santos-Dumont's little flyer, the Demoiselle, that can fly away from them all?" went on Andrews, pushing the Englishman's privilege of a hearty grumble. "Ah, there it is, right here behind the Farman, in the corner of the Clement-Bayard paddock, so to speak. Don't you see—tucked under the wing of that big, prosperous-looking biplane of theirs."

"It's a little wonder, sure enough!" agreed Plamenac. "But it doesn't greatly concern *us*, Bob! It's something grown-up we're after. Let's begin here with this Wright, and work round through the successful machines. Then we'll go through the experimental one, and the freak ones, afterwards, and see if they afford us any new ideas."

"Yes," agreed the Englishman, "but let's rather begin here on the right, with this Farman. I've taken a tremendous fancy to the Farman. I saw what it could do, you know, at Rheims."

"It has the *look* of a flyer, anyhow," assented Sergius, "which is more than I can say of your special pet, the Voisin."

They moved over close to the ropes of the Farman enclosure, and stood studying the huge, shapely machine in profile. At a desk

in one corner of the enclosure sat a trim-looking girl with a magnificent head of red hair, and a spotless white blouse. Noting, with subtle business instinct, the intentness of these two among the numerous idle spectators, she got up and brought them two catalogues of the Farman factory. They thanked her, and put the catalogues in their pockets; while the girl went back to her desk without paying any attention to the other spectators.

"There's intuition for you," remarked Andrews.

But Prince Sergius shook his head. "*I* lean to the monoplanes," said he.

"They're not weight-carriers," protested Andrews. "I grant them speed, and beauty, and handiness, of course. But we're interested in something that can carry weight, old chap. Lots of petrol, a passenger, a bit of grub, a box of tools! Don't forget that—a box of tools! Well, note the carrying surface of those two splendid supporting planes. Then, we *must* have *stability*. Look at the generous length of the *empennage*, the stabilizating tail. No pitching forward on your head, there!"

"The Blériot has just as much length of tail, in proportion to its wing surface!" protested Plamenac. "And so has the Antoinette!"

"But they don't carry the weight," persisted Andrews. "And then, I like this elevating rudder in front. It seems more

natural. Note that big, simple, quick-working plane! That gives quick action, I tell you. That would lift her over an unexpected obstacle in a jiffy. She's very quick in action, I've noticed; much quicker than the Voisin. I tell you, Serge, I believe she'll do!"

"Are you two men discussing the aeroplane, or the girl? She has *gorgeous* hair!"

The soft, gay voice and irreproachable French accent at their elbow made the men turn sharply, hat-in-hand.

"Madame de L'Orme!" exclaimed Prince Sergius, with a swift apprehension which it would have puzzled him to explain. "Why, I thought you were in Belgrade!" At the same time he bent low over the small gloved hand which she held out to him.

"But do hurry, Prince, and tell me how glad you are that I'm *not* in Belgrade—or Captain Andrews, I am sure, will forestall you. I don't need an introduction, Captain Andrews," she continued, holding out her hand to him in turn. "Prince Sergius has told me lots of lovely things about you, and promised to bring you to see me on your return to Belgrade. He must not wait for that, for now I'm in Paris."

"You are most kind, Madame!" answered the Englishman. "Indeed, I shall *see* that he does not wait—not one moment longer than he is obliged to."

She was an altogether delightful apparition, graceful and well-groomed in her long,

dark-green, straight-lined, narrow coat. Her little three-cornered "Marquis" hat of darkest green beaver, with a large gold butterfly pinned upon one side of it, added piquancy to the unusual beauty of her face. Her complexion was of a whiteness that was warm and healthy, though without colour; her mouth, though larger than men think they admire, was one of the peculiar charms of her face, subtle, passionate, sensitive, and red with the living hue that no cosmetic stick can bestow. As for her eyes, one could tell that they were large, and very dark; but the fascination of them was something far beyond that, always changing, and altogether elusive. Andrews looked at her with so frank an excess of admiration that she laughed, girlishly embarrassed; and Prince Sergius exclaimed:

"I fear, Madame, I'll have to bring him this very evening, or forfeit his friendship for ever. May we call to-night? And where are you stopping?"

"Yes, you may came this evening," she answered graciously. "I'm at the Hotel Meurice—mamma has come in from St Germain to stay with me, and she'll be delighted to see you. She's here with me now, but she has retired to the balcony, tired and cross and bewildered with aeroplanes, which she doesn't understand at all. She insists that they require the baloons to lift them, and naturally thinks they might be of some more sensible shape. *I* can't tear myself away from them.

But, tell me, which *were* you talking about when I stole up behind you? The aeroplane? or the girl? when Captain Andrews said so earnestly, 'She'll do'?"

"It wasn't the girl," protested Andrews hastily.

"He's got it into his head that he wants to buy an aeroplane, and fly it," explained Prince Sergius. "And as I value his neck, if he doesn't, I'm trying to cool his ardour."

She turned her eyes full upon him, wide with inquiry.

"But I thought it was *you,* Prince Sergius, who were so interested in flying!" she exclaimed. "I've heard so much about your wonderful experiments, and the strange machines you've built, and the daring things you've done with them, down there in your seclusion at M'latza. Why should you discourage Captain Andrews?"

An involuntary glance of astonishment, of suspicion, flashed between the eyes of the two men. It was instantaneous, but Madame de L'Orme intercepted it, and smiled. The prompt reply of Prince Sergius, however, was simple and candid.

"Surely you've given reason enough, dear Madame. It's because I know so well the dangers that I would discourage him. Because I have found it so hard to save my own neck, I don't want my friend to risk his. Besides, you have exaggerated the importance of my poor little experiments at M'latza.

Like all good Servians, I raise pigs down there. Naturally, it takes some very exciting hobby to divert my mind from that engrossing occupation."

The lady seemed content.

"Well," she said gaily, "since you know all about it, you may take me around with you, and explain the different machines to me. Oh, you needn't think you'll find me hopeless!"

Both men hastened to protest that nothing could be further from their thoughts.

"I know," she continued, "what insane questions most women would ask about such things. But I've always taken an interest; I know the difference between a supporting plane and a petrol tank. But I've gone the rounds this morning, and I've had so many stupid answers to my questions that I'm a bit confused. Please come over here, and tell me the *real* difference between this darling little Demoiselle of Santos-Dumont's, and the monoplanes of Blériot and Latham. I'm capable of perceiving for myself that it's smaller, and also that it has the seat far underneath the body, instead of in it, which ought to make it steadier, I should think."

"Good," said Andrews. His flattering eyes added, in a language which she was expert to read, "It is superfluous for you to be so beautiful, when you are so intelligent."

But Sergius answered in a matter-of-fact voice.

"I'll do my best, Madame, for so apt a

student. The *essential* difference, I think, between the little Demoiselle and the other monoplanes is in the fact that its control requires to be chiefly instinctive. In this regard it is as a motor-bicycle to an automobile. It is an intensely personal little flyer. In those other machines—as you've doubtless noticed—everything is done by conscious, considered movements of controlling wheels or levers. Not only the motions that govern the motor, starting and stopping, regulating speed, and so forth, but those that govern elevation and descent, those of turning to right or left, and of warping of wing-tips or ailerons—the vital matter of maintaining lateral stability—are controlled by wheels or levers, or a combination of both, forcing the aviator to *think* with amazing quickness of the most amazingly important and complicated things. The degree of this complexity varies very much in the different types of machine. I think Santos-Dumont has got it reduced to the minimum. His *stability* is *instinctive*. When he takes his seat, he catches that bit of harness, so to speak, to his shoulders. You see the cords that run from it? He makes his body a part of the machine. If it tops towards the right, he instinctively, inevitably, leans to the left. That warps both wing-tips—the rear corner of the right wing downward, the rear corner of the left one upward—in just the manner needed to bring her back to an even keel. If the machine leans to the left, the instinctive action is reversed. It works quicker than one

could think. The thing becomes, in a way, like riding a bicycle. Further, if the machine tries to pitch forward, the natural impulse is to throw the body back, which tips the elevating plane at the tail in such a way as to lift her nose as you lift a horse's head. If she tries to rear on her tail, of course he leans forward, which depresses the elevating plane, and brings her once more level. It sounds more or less simple, doesn't it? And Santos-Dumont says it *is* simple. As for speed, the little beauty can fly away from them all, with ease."

"I'll surely get a Demoiselle of my very own, and take it back to Belgrade with me!" exclaimed Madame de L'Orme, more than half in earnest. "I believe I could learn to manage it."

"Please don't," begged Andrews, as the three made their way across the hall to the great red R.E.P. machine. She laughed at him with her eyes, provocatively, and turned again to Prince Sergius.

"Now tell me," she demanded, "why they have this sinister-looking crimson thing in such a conspicuous place. I've never heard of its doing anything important."

"No; and I don't think it *will* do anything important until it has been considerably modified," answered Plamenac. "It *has* made several short flights, unimportant ones; but my idea is that it has too much keel, and too much of what I may call, for convenience, back fin. Also, I should think the wings

were too deep, fore and aft, for their spread. However, I fancy the inventor, Esnault-Pelterie (his name's Robert, that's why the machine's called the R.E.P.) knows more about all that than I do. He's a clever fellow. He makes a fine motor. And I dare say he'll ultimately evolve something out of this unpromising affair, and surprise us. Meanwhile, it doesn't count. It's here, because he's a good sportsman and one of the chief organizers of the whole show. Let's go over there and see that Voisin. No use stopping at this Blériot here, next to the R.E.P. It's just a bright new replica of the Cross-Channel machine there in the centre."

CHAPTER V

AT THE GRAND PALAIS (*continued*)

THEY passed the smart Blériot, and some handsome motor-boats, with scarcely a glance. They ignored the great yellow globe of a balloon, suspended in the middle of the transept, with the two ridiculous pneumatic figures of a man and woman gesticulating in the basket. And they stood before the big, clean Voisin machine in its semi-retired position. They worked through the crowd that stood in front of it. Then they moved around and studied it from the side, in its odd profile. The French woman seemed as earnest in her interest as either of the men, winning thereby the deep approval of both, and quite banishing the suspicions which Prince Sergius had felt at first over her unexpected knowledge of his affairs.

"Now, that's a machine you can swear by," exclaimed Andrews.

"It looks to me like a collection of nice new packing-cases!" declared Madame de L'Orme.

The men laughed.

"It does certainly look less like a thing that can fly than any of the other machines,"

agreed Prince Sergius. "But it *does* fly. I'm not sure, but you're right, Bob. I'm inclined to think, taking it all round, it's the greatest machine for the greatest number of people, that has yet taken the air."

"Why?" demanded Madame. "People don't seem to get so excited over it as over some of the others."

"That's because of its solid, steady-going look," said Andrews. "When you see a Voisin flying, it looks as steady as a table, and goes on about its business as if it considered flying to be as simple an affair as picking gooseberries. I'll *learn* on a Voisin. I've made up my mind to that much."

"Yes, but *why*?" persisted Madame, turning her bright eyes from one face to the other, eager for information.

"Well, it's the easiest to learn on," responded Prince Sergius. "There are perhaps more people now flying Voisins successfully than there are flying all the other machines put together. And the secret of *that* is in just that packing-case arrangement, which looks so ungraceful. That gives stability, lateral stability. Of all the machines, this is the only one which has a tendency to right itself, when it starts to tip over side-ways. There's no warping of wings or ailerons to keep it steady, so the aviator has that much less to think about. So long as there is no wind to bother him, he has less to do than on any of the other flyers. You see, Madame, those up-and-down partitions tend strongly to resist a

lateral tipping. And the faster the machine is driven through the air the greater becomes its lateral stability, for the columns of air being forced through the open cubes at high speed seem to acquire a sort of rigidity. You must stop me if I lecture too much."

"Indeed!" protested Madame de L'Orme with enthusiasm, "you're telling me just the very things I've been dying to find out. But why, if the Voisin has such advantages, doesn't everybody fly with it? Why do they bother with the other machines that have this terrible inclination to tip over side-ways?"

"Well, like most of us they have the defects of their qualities. For one thing, they are not very speedy. *Fast* and sure, that's not the way the saying runs, you know. Those upright partitions increase considerably what we call the 'skin friction,' and that holds her back. But the main thing is this. As the machine depends more on itself than on its pilot for its lateral stability, if that stability is attacked from outside—by a gust of wind, for instance—there's little the pilot can do to help himself. If the attack is strong enough to overcome the machine's automatic stability, the pilot can't do much to prevent her overturning, except by bringing her round sharply in the other direction—if he has time! On the other hand, in those machines where the lateral stability is maintained by the aviator's warping of the wing-tips, the aviator can do wonders—if he is clever enough at the business. On a Farman,

or a Blériot, for instance, he can ride out a wind which would surely upset the Voisin, no matter how clever the pilot."

"It's the difference between a row-boat and a canoe, Madame," interjected Andrews, who was an enthusiastic canoeist. "A row-boat is much steadier, much safer, than a canoe. But in the hands of a master, the canoe can safely ride out seas which would be bound to swamp or upset the row-boat."

"That's it, Bob, in a nutshell," said Prince Sergius. "If you *must* risk your precious neck on an aëroplane, you'll risk it least by learning on a Voisin."

"Yet you haven't raised the least objection to me risking my neck on a Demoiselle!" said Madame de L'Orme, reproachfully.

"If *you* really contemplated learning to fly, Madame"—"Which would surely be most appropriate," interjected Andrews—"I would undertake to teach you myself, and make myself personally responsible for the safety of that inimitable neck," responded the Prince.

Madame gave her neck a little twist within its stiff collar, as if to assure herself it was not yet endangered, then clapped her hands daintly and laughed.

"There, I *knew* you knew how to fly!" she cried delightedly. "I may hold you to that promise, when you least expect it."

"My poor best shall be at your service," replied Plamenac. But at the same time a whimsical sense of apprehension flashed over him. She might possibly be in earnest. And

she might call upon him to redeem his promise at some time when it would be inconvenient either to comply or to refuse.

By this time they had come over to the third corner, and were looking at the long, slender, exquisite profile of that most beautiful and most fascinating of all the flyers, the Antoinette. The suggestion of a gigantic dragon-fly was very marked, much more so than in the case of the Santos-Dumont machine, which was named for that swift insect. This was the type in which Latham had so nearly crossed the Channel, falling into the waves within a mile of Dover Pier. This was the type in which he had soared to such daring heights at Rheims; in which he had electrified Berlin by his flight over the roofs from the Tempelhof field. The long, tapered wings seemed to have been modelled for speed and efficiency. The very long, slender, highly polished body, with its fine nose, tipped by the propeller, projecting a couple of feet beyond the base of the wings—instead of being cut off bluntly close to the wings, as in the Blériot and the Santos-Dumont—added to the effect of the darting insect, which was still further heightened by the long rod sloping outward and downward from beneath the throat to the ground, and curling upwards at the point. This organ, called "the skate," and peculiar to the Antoinette, looked like some sort of huge antenna. The shining array of the tops of the eight-cylindered motor, packed into the

head just behind the propeller, suggested a cluster of eyes. And the compact, harmonious arrangement of the feathering planes and horizontal and vertical rudders at the taper extremity of the body, made a most satisfying tail. The place for the aviator's seat, just behind the wings, was inconspicuous.

"There's the machine that most appeals to *me*," cried Prince Sergius, unable to subdue the thrill of enthusiasm in his voice.

"Oh, it is surely the most beautiful," echoed Madame de L'Orme.

"And it has done wonderful things," continued the Prince. "It has flown in a wind that no other aëroplane could dare to face. A real wind, half a gale, and mastered it triumphantly!"

"But so far," objected the Englishman, "for all her beauty and her breeding, she seems a skittish and unmanageable filly. No one has been able to do anything with her but Hubert Latham. With any other rider she balks, rears, or lies down. You don't catch her proud creator himself, Levavasseur, trying to manage her."

"Oh," retorted Prince Sergius, with a confident ring in his voice, "*I'll* manage her. I feel that she is made for me. Beside, I don't believe it's ever the fault of the machine. It's the fault of the motor. Those Antoinette motors are far too light for their power. They're altogether too sensitive, too tricky. Levavasseur has cut them down too fine.

Why, I've seen a man of ordinary size carrying easily on his shoulder a 100-horse-power Antoinette motor! What can you expect? Sometimes they work to a miracle. Sometimes they won't work at all. Sometimes a damp draught, or even a harsh word, seems enough to upset their nervous system and give them dangerous hysterics. No, I want to try that machine with an Anzani motor, or still better with a Gnome. I believe that if Latham had been using a Gnome he'd have got across the Channel at his first try."

"I'll have a Gnome on my Demoiselle," said Madame de L'Orme with decision.

"But the Antoinette doesn't carry weight," objected Andrews.

"She could be made to, very simply," replied the Prince. "That's an easy matter, with her lines. Besides, she has another advantage. She——" but here he hesitated, and seemed to change his mind.

"What other advantage?" demanded Madame de L'Orme, a gleam of sharp interest leaping into her great eyes.

"I was going to say something quite foolish," answered Plamenac.

Andrews gave him a steady look with a tinge of amusement in it.

"*Please* say it!" insisted the lady. "It would be such an amusing change. I've never been able to make Prince Sergius say anything foolish yet, and have felt my charms discredited on that account."

"No," said Plamenac positively, "I'm not going to say it. I refuse to impair my infallibility in your eyes."

"But I insist. You've excited all my curiosity, and now you leave it unsatisfied," pouted Madame, persuasively petulant. "Make him tell me, Captain Andrews."

"If *you* cannot, Madame, what do you think *my* persuasions would count for?" answered the Englishman. Prince Sergius met her eyes with an admiring but baffling smile.

"If you were so rash as to start me telling you things, dear lady, I might tell you too much!" he retorted ambiguously. She had it on her tongue to challenge him, but, with a half-vexed laugh, she refrained.

As they were re-crossing the hall to the further corner, that upon the left of the entrance, the crowd was so great that their conversation was interrupted. Andrews, his lofty shoulders towering above the throng, guided Madame through. Plamenac, who had paused for a second to look at some detail of the Antoinette propeller, was separated from them. He rejoined them immediately, however, at the ropes of the Wright stand. He had no intention of leaving Andrews—whom he imagined much more susceptible than he really was—alone with Madame de L'Orme. He was jealous of anything that might divert ever so little of the Englishman's attention from the vital matter in hand. And for Madame he felt a curious mingling of attraction and distrust.

Madame de L'Orme and Andrews were standing very close together as Prince Sergius came up beside them.

"*Why* do you look at me so suspiciously, Prince Sergius?" demanded the lady, gaily. "We were talking aeroplanes. Nothing more frivolous, I assure you."

"Or nothing more serious? In *that* case I could not forgive you!" bantered Plamenac.

"Now you are laughing at me," said Madame. "And I don't like it. I think it's only aëroplanes—and perhaps men—that you take seriously. In that case, why aren't you more enthusiastic over this famous Wright machine, which, it seems to me, I've heard talked about more than any other?"

"I *am* enthusiastic about it!" answered Prince Sergius. "Who could help being? And I'm enthusiastic about its inventors; and about all the men who fly it. But, I don't want to fly it myself. And I don't intend to try."

"I agree with you there, Serge," put in Andrews.

"You'll think I'm not good for anything at all, except to ask questions," said Madame, "but I can't help it. *Why* don't you like it? I think it's awfully interesting-looking, and much the most graceful of the biplanes. It looks exactly as if it wanted to jump into the air, of itself."

"Yes, it's fascinating," agreed Plamenac. "But to my mind it has two grave faults.

It's inconvenient; and it is essentially unstable. It's inconvenient, surely, in having to be launched from its pylon, with a weight and a starting rail; so that if, on a journey, it has to come down to remedy some little defect in the motor, or get more petrol, it can't start again unless some one kindly comes along and builds a new pylon for it. Once down, it's as helpless as a butterfly that has fallen into the water,"

"Yes, I understand about that," said the lady. "I have wondered about it, too. But I suppose the Wrights could put wheels to it, like the other machines, if they wanted to."

"Perhaps they could. But they don't," answered Plamenac. "Perhaps they think it's perfect as it is. On the other hand, perhaps it's because wheels, and the chains to support the wheels, would mean a lot of additional weight. The Wright motor, you know, is heavy. It's an extraordinarily sound and reliable motor, but it weighs twice as much per horse-power as the other flying motors. However, I've really no doubt that the Wrights can get over that difficulty when they want to. It's mainly exhibition flying they've been concerned with so far, and that, certainly, they have achieved to a marvel. When it's to their interest to go in for cross-country flying, they'll have to come to wheels. But the instability of the machine is inherent in its design."

"Wait a bit, old chap," interrupted

Andrews. "Madame de L'Orme is really a student of these flighty affairs. I believe if you give her a chance, now, she'll put her finger right on the difficulty."

Madame moved around to the side of the enclosure, and surveyed the machine with wide, intent eyes, eager to justify the Englishman's expectations. Presently her face flashed with delight, and she clapped her hands like a child.

"I know—I think I know!" she cried. "It looks too short. It hasn't enough tail."

"Bravo!" said Andrews.

"I see I'll have an apt pupil," approved Prince Sergius. "That's it. In fact, it really has no tail at all. Those two little perpendicular planes, on their short skeleton frame, are the steering rudder simply. They don't give any balance at all, of themselves, but only as they are managed by the clever aviator. Heavens, *what* aviators they are those two Americans. What unerring mastery! Their machine becomes a part of themselves. The man and the machine together make a bird! But it takes long to learn this machine. And I firmly believe that it is only a few men who are capable of learning it at all."

"In a word," put in Andrews, whose watchful eyes had noticed that Madame de L'Orme was not yet fully satisfied, "in a word, we think some sort of a true tail, a horizontal plane at the tip of a long body stretching out behind the supporting planes,

is absolutely essential for safety. As you'll notice, the Voisin lies at the one extreme, providing in itself, as far as is yet possible, for both lateral and fore-and-aft stability. Midway come the other successful machines —Farman, Blériot, Antoinette, Santos-Dumont—providing for fore-and-aft stability more or less automatically, and leaving only the lateral stability to be entirely governed by the pilot. Then, at the other extreme, comes this beautiful acrobat of the air, the Wright machine, in which both lateral and fore-and-aft stability are entirely in the hands of the pilot. If he makes a mistake, God forgive the pilot, for the machine won't."

"Here's the lift, by the door. My head's crushed with all this wisdom. I must go and find mamma!" said Madame, putting out both hands at the same time to her two escorts in her gracious French way. "Thank you so much! But I'm going to ask more, much more. Will you both take me with you, one day, to see the flights at Juvisy?"

"We'll be only too much honoured," answered Andrews quickly.

"Yes, indeed!" agreed Plamenac. "We'll try to take you on the best day of the meeting, when everything is well in train—after we've been down once or twice by ourselves in order to get to know the ropes."

"*Entendu!*" said Madame. "Till to-night, then. Hotel Meurice, right after dinner!" and she stepped into the little lift

that takes tired visitors up to the buffet in the gallery.

The two men hesitated after she was gone.

"How did you come to let the little lady off without a lecture on the Blériot?" asked Andrews.

Plamenac smiled.

"I don't think I could have interested her in the differences between the Blériot and the Antoinette. They're too technical. And I'm a trifle hazy on them myself. The difference that stands out in my mind is one that, curiously enough, I found I didn't want to speak about to Madame de L'Orme. Some queer instinct! It's the boat-like body of the Antoinette, with a little ingenuity, one could manage it so that there would be no great danger in descending upon the water. See?"

"Sly old devil, Serge!" said Andrews.

"You've got to be careful there, Bob," expostulated Plamenac. "That little witch might charm out of a man the skeleton in his bride's closet."

"Don't worry about me, old chap. I'm as dumb as an oyster on points I don't want to speak about. Shall we go and look at the rest of the machines?"

"No," suggested Plamenac. "I've had enough for the moment. Let's come in again to-morrow morning, before the crowd, and look over all the experiments, models and freaks. We may get some ideas. I don't think there's much of importance left, except the Kœchlin machines and the Raoul-

Vendômes, and perhaps the Fernandez biplane, which have succeeded in flying more or less."

"All right. Let's get up to the Elysée Palace and have tea!" said Andrews, lighting a cigarette.

CHAPTER VI

PARIS GOES TO JUVISY

PARIS, it appeared, had gone quite mad over flying. This, be it remembered, was in October, 1909. To the flying world how long ago it seems!

It was advertised to be one of the greatest days of the Flying Fortnight at the Juvisy Aerodrome. And it was a public holiday. All Paris had made up its mind to be there. Almost before the day's journeying had well begun the railways found themselves overwhelmed.

Late in the morning, after a hurried lunch, Prince Sergius and Andrews, with Madame de L'Orme, arrived at the Gare D'Orsay, the central station of the Paris-Orleans railway. The station was almost in a state of siege. The ticket-windows were surrounded by a surging mob ; but Andrews, a veteran traveller, had got tickets in advance, so that the mob was of no consequence. Everywhere stood policemen—with the alert, stern air which tells at once that something unusual has been happening. From everywhere came murmurs of indignation, with rumours of lines blocked and of trains hung up.

Plamenac and Andrews glanced anxiously at their slim charge.

"Let's get out of this! Let's motor down!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"We'd never get a motor now," said the Prince. "And a motor would never get near the aerodrome."

But Madame's eyes were dancing under her trim black hat.

"Motor! What nonsense! I love this! I've dressed for a lark. I knew it would be this way. It's going to be the greatest fun in the world, and I don't care *what* happens."

"You're game! Come on then!" said Prince Sergius with approval. Taking her by her arms, one on each side, the two men adroitly worked her through the crowd, past the sorely-tried ticket-punchers, and down the broad stairway to the underground tracks. At the foot they passed a harassed-looking official, who stood staring at vacancy.

"When does the next train go, Monsieur?" inquired Prince Sergius politely.

The man shrugged his shoulders, and threw out the palms of both hands, expressively repudiating all pretence of either knowledge or responsibility.

On either side of the platform stood a train of tremendous length, its carriages packed, jammed and oozing with passengers, while hopeless crowds wandered up and down, staring at the windows. Our three adventurers traversed nearly the whole length of the train before Andrews, peering in from the vantage of his height, discovered some unpre-empted space in the recesses of a third-class carriage.

"We can get in there," he whispered. "Do you mind going third, Madame?"

"All classes are one on a day like this, when Paris is out to play!" answered Madame happily.

But both men hesitated.

"Which train goes out first?" asked Plamenac of a porter who was passing.

The man jerked his thumb toward the one they thought of entering.

"Then it's probably the other. He doesn't know anything about it. And neither does anyone else!" said Andrews with conviction.

But at the some moment several people in the other train, who, with their heads out of the window, had heard Plamenac's question and seen the porter's reply, exploded with fury.

"And this sacred pig-dog of a train had been waiting here over an hour!" they clamoured in shrill chorus. Throwing open the door, they descended and raced across the platform, with the intention of forcing a way into the other train. Andrews, seeing their intention the instant they started to open the door, caught Madame de L'Orme by the arm, muttered to Plamenac in English, "Now's our chance, quick!" and rushed across. As the others descended, the nearby crowd surged forward to seize their places; but Andrews and Plamenac were too quick for them. As they lifted Madame de L'Orme into the carriage, one at each elbow, they barred the rush inexorably. They had not more

than squeezed in and pulled-to the door behind them, when, to their amazed exultation, the train began to move. A pandemonium of jeers arose on the platform, at the expense of the unfortunates who had been so foolish as to change their seats. It was twelve o'clock.

"You see, Serge, what a lot that porter knew about it?" said Andrews.

"What a lark this is!" murmured Madame happily.

The train crawled through the tunnel. Arriving at the Point St Michael Station it continued to crawl, refusing to stop for the waiting crowds who cursed it bitterly as it rumbled by. Once more in the tunnel on the other side of the station, Prince Sergius heaved a sigh of relief.

"I half expected those angry beggars on the platform to begin smashing in our windows as we passed," said he.

"By Jove, they sounded ready for it," chuckled the Englishman, like a pleased boy.

"If glass begins to fly we'll have to wrap your head and shoulders up in our coats," said Plamenac.

"I shan't mind that in the least," said the lady.

In the depths of the tunnel the train stopped, resignedly. It rested. The air grew heavy. The third-class carriage reeked with assorted odours.

"Please smoke!" begged Madame de L'Orme.

Half an hour later the train moved again.

Presently it crawled into the Gare d'Austerlitz. It had accomplished perhaps two miles of its journey.

Here, in the main Paris station of the P. & O. Railway, the mob was far worse than at the Gare d'Orsay; for it was the mob of the more disorderly part of the city. But soldiers and gendarmes were everywhere, and kept the crowd somewhat in hand. On some of the side-tracks stood cars with all the glass smashed and the curtains torn to shreds. People forced their way into carriages already jammed to the limit, while excited porters rushed along the train slamming doors and expostulating desperately. Several other trains, all packed, stood awaiting some mysterious permission to start.

"We'll be lucky," muttered Plamenac, "if we get away from here under an hour."

Even as he spoke, the train began to move, while groans and cries went up from the other trains. All who were left behind were sure that there was gross favouritism somewhere.

"We *are* lucky," said Andrews. "You must be our mascot, Madame!"

"May you always be so!" echoed Prince Sergius. But even as he spoke, an inexplicable doubt assailed him.

"I'll try my best, even if I have to fly with you!" said Madame.

For a good half hour the train rolled on steadily—but not rapidly.

"Juvisy is about eighteen minutes, by

schedule, from the Austerlitz Station," said the Prince, looking at his watch. "I wonder where we are now."

He turned and craned his neck to look out of the window. "I can see," said Andrews. "We're just about three miles outside the fortifications. At this rate we'll get to Juvisy in about——"

But as the words were in his mouth, with a dispirited bump the train stopped, and Andrews followed its example.

"You'd better not hazard a prophecy, Captain Andrews," cautioned Madame de L'Orme. "Let's just be glad we're here."

She was jammed in her seat between a fat, perspiring concierge and a grimy, but good-natured *charbonnier,* while Andrews and Prince Sergius, who had no seats, stood over her to protect her from the rest of the standing and swaying crowd.

"As some of my American friends would say, Madame, you are a 'dead game sport'!" remarked the Prince.

"Nonsense!" rejoined Madame. "Why, I'm enjoying myself amazingly. I get hungry for adventure, you know. And *this* is *adventure,* for me."

A train, interminably long, and brimming, rattled by on the next track. Its passengers jeered triumphantly, and were answered with vindictive yells from the whole length of the stalled carriages. But in a little while, for no apparent reason, the train started again, and even got up quite a respectable speed.

Presently it, in turn, overtook and passed its lately vainglorious rival. The exchange of invective and derision was whole-souled.

"Oh, aren't they too funny!" exclaimed Madame.

"It eases their feelings, and saves glass," replied Plamenac, who understood, better than Andrews, the Latin temperament.

As he spoke the train ran past the station of Ablon. Every window in the building was smashed. Everything conveniently wreckable was wrecked.

"Apparently," said Andrews, "somebody didn't yell hard enough at Ablon."

"It would seem so," agreed the Prince.

The grimy workman at Madame's left chuckled appreciatively. The atmosphere was cordially democratic.

From this point onward the train, though its pace once more diminished to a crawl, came no more to a stop until it crept apologetically into the station of Juvisy.

"We've taken our tickets to the next station, Savigny," said Plamenac. "The aviation course is really at Savigny, because the entrance is on the Savigny side—a long way, and a difficult way from Juvisy."

"Most of our fellow-passengers are of our way of thinking, it appears," remarked Andrews.

A handful of misguided folk having descended at Juvisy, the train reluctantly resumed its journey. It was now two o'clock.

"We've been two solid hours doing fifteen kilometres," said the Prince.

"But we've got to Juvisy," answered Madame, with undaunted optimism.

It is perhaps four kilometres (two and a half miles) from Juvisy to Savigny-sur-Orge. The doubtful train crept on till it had covered more than three quarters of the distance in something more than fifteen minutes. Then it stopped with an air of saying, "I'm done."

It was in the midst of pleasant, open fields. Temptingly near, across a poplar grove and the quiet waters of the winding Orge, could be seen the fluttering flags of the aerodrome. Alluringly came the strains of the hunting horns. Doors of the carriages were flung open. Some adventurous spirits descended. The train was on an embankment. Beside the tracks ran a collection of taut wires, to a height of perhaps three feet, the wires by which switches and signals were worked from the station. Along the foot of the embankment ran a close fence. The adventurous spirits looked at the train scornfully. Then they straddled carefully over the wires, scaled the fence, and raced off exultantly across the fields towards the highway which would obviously lead them to the gates of the Aerodrome.

The example was infectious. All along the train, men and women and children began jumping, dropping, pouring from the compartments. Only the sober, conventional

souls seemed content to stand by the train and await its possible arrival at Savigny. Prince Sergius, Captain Andrews, and Madame de L'Orme were not of the conventional souls. The men descended, and held up their hands to help Madame down.

As she paused in the compartment door, a smart-looking young woman from the adjoining compartment was just being helped by her escort over the array of signal wires. The escort was awkward. Ensued an indiscreet, though not uninteresting, display of lingerie and silk stockings. Madame de L'Orme gave a little shriek of protest.

"Oh, if *you* can't take better care of *me* than that, I'll stay in the train and go on to the station."

"You can trust us!" laughed Prince Sergius.

"Don't be alarmed, Madame," added Andrews. "That charming exhibition was not at all necessary. We owe it to the goodness of the lady's heart. I've been observing with some care, and *all* the displays have been charming. Hence I infer that if they had *not*——"

"Never mind," interrupted Madame, jumping down lightly between them. "I quite understand, sir. Lift me over *very* carefully."

Which they did.

Meanwhile the crowd, which had treated the switch wires with scrupulous care, had made short work of the fence. Along the

whole length of the train it had been laid flat, and here and there broken up to bridge some muddy places. Every one was in a good humour now. The train had been flouted; the railway fence had been destroyed, and the entrance to the Aerodrome was not ten minutes distant.

"Oh, what fun!" cried Madame, as they swung her over a patch of mud.

"And we save a good ten minutes over the regular route, in the bargain," said Andrews. "That will count when it comes to getting seats!"

On the further side of the field they gained a footpath along the Orge. This brought them, in five minutes more, to the highway. Here they found troops by the hundreds—cavalry, guards, zouaves—directing and controlling the crowds. The highway was divided down its middle by a temporary fence, along one side of which rolled the throng in a massive, gay-coloured torrent, whole along the other side moved the automobiles in a close string, almost touching. Progress was slow now, but there, close ahead, were the lofty eagle standards that marked the Blériot gate. Here they swerved from the throng, most of which kept on to the cheaper tribunes and the one franc entrance of the *pelouse, or* "standing-room." Down the Avenue Blériot progress was easier, the crowd having been thinned out here by the higher prices of the seats.

They found every seat in the pavilion

already occupied; but this they turned to their own advantage. Prince Sergius got three chairs, and found a place for them close by the railing, almost exactly level with the starting line. Flying had not yet begun, because the wind, though falling, was still tricky and dangerous. But the red flag, announcing that they were about to fly, was just fluttering to the top of the signal-mast which stood some hundred yards out in the field.

"It's just three o'clock," said Andrews.

"And we've got the best seats in the whole place," said Prince Sergius.

CHAPTER VII

THE FLYING AT JUVISY IN OCTOBER, 1909

At intervals around the vast enclosure stood what looked like little white balloons affixed to the tops of lamp-posts. These marked the inner line of the course, a circuit of two kilometres. All along behind the barrier which marked the outer limits of the course, to a distance of more than half a kilometre, stretched the dark throng of spectators. Far across the field, so far that one felt the need of field-glasses, stood two squat sheds—hangars for aeroplanes—and in front of them the red open-work tower, or pylon, used in starting the Wright machines. Along the left, perhaps a hundred yards behind the starting line, and at right angles to the front of the Grand Stand, ran an array of hangars, each flying a little flag, red, green, violet, blue, parti-coloured, or adorned with some device. It made one think of the tents of the jousters at a tournament in the Day of Chivalry, where the head-quarters of each knight were proclaimed by his shield or his pennon. Men rushed busily hither and thither before the hangars, some of which were closed, while others had thrown open their doors, giving glimpses of propellers and

planes, of mysterious, fascinating, incomprehensible shapes. Above the stands the ranks of flapping banners began to droop, for the wind was dying away. The vast crowd was tense with expectation. Quaint, coloured signals began to mount the halliards, beneath the long red flag on the signal mast.

"What in the world do all those queer little red, and white, and blue things mean, which they are hoisting over there on that flagstaff?" demanded Madame de L'Orme.

"Those are the signals," answered Plamenac, "to tell us what's going on! You see there is a yard or sprit on each side of the mast. On the left they hang out signals to tell how fast the wind is blowing, what prizes are being competed for, and other general information. You see there now a little group consisting of a white globe, a blue cylinder, and a red cylinder. That tells the rate of the wind. What is it, Bob?"

"That means that the wind is only blowing from three to five yards a second," answered Andrews, consulting the coloured code in his programme.

"Above that," continued the Prince, "you see two signals, one a square, half white and half blue, the other a sort of hour-glass, the upper half white and the lower half red. The first one means that they are going to try for the distance prize. I forget what the other signal, the red-and-white hour-glass, stands for."

"Speed prize!" said Andrews.

"Well," began the Prince again, "on the other side they hoist the signals of the individual aviators, so we may know who is starting. Each aviator has his private signal, as well as his special flag, and a number painted in big figures on his aeroplane."

But at this point the lecture was cut short. A thrilling whirring noise, deepening to a vibrant hum, rose on the air. All along the barriers the dark crowds flashed white, as every face turned suddenly toward the hangars. In the door of one of them could be seen the nose of a monoplane, with a circular haze just in front of it. Over that shed hung a green-and-white flag.

"It's a Kœchlin monoplane trying its motor," said Andrews.

Evidently the motor needed trying. It slowed down till every one who was near enough could see the revolutions. Then it stopped. A sigh, a groan of disappointment ran along the barriers. The crowd had expected to see the machine dart forth and leap into the air. All hopes were raised again, however, the very next moment, as two aeroplanes, each pushed by a group of men, came creeping into view, one from the row of hangars, the other from behind the clubhouse on the left. Both were biplanes.

"They're Voisins, both!" exclaimed Madame breathlessly.

"No," corrected the Prince. "Only one's a Voisin. The one with the big 4 on the side of the rear cell."

"That's Gaudart," said Andrews, referring hastily to his programme. "There's his signal on the mast—a white globe over a red one. He'll start first."

The propeller began to whirr. A cry of "There he starts" ran along the ranks of spectators.

"No, he's trying the motor!" said Plamenac.

"Ah, he's climbing into the seat," cried Madame. "See, he's moving the little forward plane up and down, to see if it works right."

The group surrounding the aeroplane fell suddenly apart. The great white machine moved forward.

"Oh, he's started!" cried Madame, clasping her hands.

"He's off! He's coming! It's No. 4! It's Gaudart! Who is he?" ran the eager, broken cries along the thronged barriers and the tiers of seats.

The starting place, as we have seen, was immediately in front of the hangars, a hundred yards or so behind the official line, at which point, to make an official start, it was required that the machines should be unmistakably in the air. Within some twenty-five paces of this line the wheels of the great white biplane visibly left the ground. "*Il monte*" —"*He's in the air!*" rang the eager voices. At a height of about five feet Gaudart crossed the line. To see the massive cellular structure skimming along so near the ground, yet

not touching it, was a miraculous and bewildering sight.

Beyond the line Gaudart began to rise higher. But immediately, for no reason that one could see, the machine began to tilt slowly toward the left. The crowd held its breath. Gaudart veered a little to the right, toward the barriers. The machine came back to an even keel. But at the same time it began to descend. The note of the motor changed.

"Motor's going back on him!" growled Andrews discontentedly.

"Oh, he's coming down!" wailed Madame.

It was true. Just at the first turn, the wheels touched earth. The crowd groaned sympathetically. The machine ran along the ground a little way, turning inward away from the course. Then it stopped dead. The motor sputtered. The propeller turned feebly—stopped. Gaudart sprang from his seat, ran around the wing, and poked his head in among the machinery. From the crowd surrounding the signal mast—where was placed also the judge's stand—came running several men to see if the aviator needed help. After these cantered deliberately a dark-uniformed trooper, with glittering gilded helmet, and long plume streaming behind him.

The assistants began pushing the machine back toward the starting point.

"He'll make another try," said Andrews. "See, his signal stays up. But there's

another going up beneath it, a white globe over a white triangle. That's No. 5, Guillaune Busson. He's got a machine they call the W.L.D. I don't know anything about it."

"There it is—the one Madame took for a Voisin!" said Prince Sergius. "But you see how different it is."

"Of course!" exclaimed Madame. "How stupid I am. It isn't boxed in at the sides like a Voisin—it hasn't any packing cases! And it's shorter! And—Oh, yes, of course, if it isn't boxed in, to keep it steady, it must have something for the aviator to steady it with; and there they are—two little wings at each side of him, half way between the upper and lower planes."

"Bravo!" said Andrews.

What Prince Sergius might have intended to say, by way of commending this accuracy of observation, remained unsaid; for just then the motor of the W.L.D. set up a tremendous humming, and Busson climbed to his seat. Almost immediately he was off, and at a great pace. But for all its pace, the machine refused to leave the ground. Every other second the front wheels would rise, giving an impression of tip-toe lightness; and the white planes wavered as if about to soar the next instant. But the line was crossed without the hinder wheel having quitted the turf. It was a vain start. But Busson was obstinate. He kept right on, apparently hoping every moment to get into the air.

Interested and sympathetic, the crowd cheered his progress over the rough turf. Not till he had reached the first turn, toward the south corner of the Aerodrome, did he give up hope. At this point he ran neatly round the post, and came racing back at speed toward the hangars as if he had just been out for a spin. Then the crowd began to laugh. "He's an automobile!" "*Il roule bien!*" and other good-natured gibes floated across the field.

"That *motor's* all right! It's the aeroplane that's at fault!" said Prince Sergius.

"Yes, it's the machine!" said a voice at his side, speaking English with a marked American intonation. "Not enough lift to the planes, far as I can make out."

There was an assured note in the voice which gave the words weight, and Prince Sergius turned to the speaker, who was not looking at him, but intently watching the aeroplane. He was a man of medium height, dressed in a heavy brown motoring coat, with a motoring cap pulled well down over a strong, smooth-shaven, craggy face. His mouth was large, thick-lipped, but resolute; his nose large, and somewhat hooked. Suddenly he turned upon Prince Sergius a pair of noticeably fine eyes, large, calm, and of a very dark, luminous grey.

"From things I've overheard you say," he continued, as if in half apology for having addressed a stranger, "I reckoned you knew something about these flying-machines."

But it was evident to him at once that no apology was necessary, for both Andrews and Madame de L'Orme were leaning over interestedly to catch whatever he had to say.

"I don't know half as much about them as I want to, and intend to before I'm much older," responded Prince Sergius cordially.

"Same here!" said the American.

"Oh, there's No. 4, Monsieur Gaudart, going to try again!" exclaimed Madame de L'Orme. "He's climbing into his seat."

Immediately the motor began to roar. The propeller whirled itself invisible. Next moment the attendants moved aside. The machine leaped forward as if anxious to redeem itself. Gaudart was leaning over his stearing-gear with an air of grim determination. This time he was in the air before he had got half way to the line, which he crossed at a height of ten or twelve feet. But the great machine careened from side to side alarmingly.

"I *hope* he won't go any higher!" cried Madame.

"No, he's not got his craft quite in hand," agreed Prince Sergius.

But the crowd cheered madly as Gaudart, maintaining his height, raced for the first turn. Before he reached it, however, the machine tilted heavily toward the right. To correct this, Gaudart had to turn sharply inwards. He succeeded in righting himself. But he was now heading straight for the turning-post. There was no time to avoid it,

so he made a vigorous effort to lift himself over it. The planes rose obediently, but not quite high enough. They struck the white balloon on top of the post, knocking the whole thing over. The machine sailed on for some twenty or thirty yards, and then, as if discouraged by the encounter, glided languidly to the earth, where it stopped.

The crowd emitted a sighing grumble. It was getting impatient for a real flight. Gaudart resignedly kept his seat in the machine, and waited for the assistants, who were already running to his aid.

"He ought to change his motor!" said Andrews.

"What do *you* think is the trouble, there?" demanded Prince Sergius, turning to the American, whose face had attracted him curiously.

"Your friend's right! Motor!" replied the stranger with decision. "A Vivani, ain't it? They're trying to make it too light for its power, like the Antoinette. So, its tricky."

"Listen, there's another reason!" said Madame de L'Orme.

Immediately behind them a girl's voice was saying in French:

"Of *course* that's why they can't fly. The air's too heavy to-day. You can *feel* how heavy it is."

"*Of* course," agreed her escort, in a voice which showed that he thought her explanation a brilliant one. "I hadn't thought of

that. But I suppose that *would* keep them down."

"That's worth knowing!" said Andrews with a grin.

Just then a loud whirr of propellers arose from far across the field. While attention had been occupied with the efforts of Gaudart and Busson—whose signals were now floating down from the mast—a Wright machine had been hauled from its hangar and placed in position on its starting-rail at the foot of the tall red pylon. Even at that distance the curious flicker of the two great propellers could be clearly seen.

"That's Count de Lambert. There's his signal now," said Andrews, and a black globe surmounting a black cylinder was hoisted, and a murmur of "de Lambert!" "de Lambert!" ran up and down the ranks of the crowd.

"Now you'll see some real flying," said the American proudly.

"Yes, both the machine and the man are all right," agreed Prince Sergius.

"Oh, look!" gasped Madame, catching his arm. For at this moment the weight was loosed at the top of the pylon. The biplane raced to the end of its rail and then fairly pounced into the air. With that inexpressibly light movement, the quick waving of the forward planes, and the flickering of the two long propellers in the sunlight, it suggested the flushing of a flock of plover.

"I never saw anything so lovely!" murmured Madame.

Already the Wright was some thirty feet in the air, and swooping around toward the starting line.

"Why is it we can see the propellers so plainly?" questioned Madame. "In the other machines you can't see them at all."

"The Wrights believe in a very large, slow-moving propeller," explained Prince Sergius, "not more than about 400 to 500 revolutions to the minute. The Voisin and other machines use a single small propeller, revolving very fast, at a rate of, say 1,000 to 1,500 revolutions per minute."

The flyer was now racing over the line. A rolling wave of cheers accompanied its bewildering progress past the pavilions, the stands, and the packed masses of the *pelouse*. It flew with great steadiness, as far as lateral motion was concerned, for its pilot, Count de Lambert, was Wilbur Wright's first pupil, and a finished aviator. But it was continually dipping and curtseying as it went, or rising and falling in long curves, like the flight of the golden-wing woodpecker when it crosses an open field. Nevertheless, there was an assuredness about the flight which made every one feel that this was, in very truth, the Conquest of the Air. It looked as if it might be very hard to learn, but, at the same time, as if it was the easiest thing in the world for this imperturbable aviator perched aloft on his dipping and sliding planes. Now

the machine was flickering down the furthest side of the aerodrome, just below the tops of the dark line of poplars. Here, probably because it was encountering no air-currents, it flew perfectly level, and resembled nothing so much as a wild duck in its flight. In what seemed an incredibly short space of time it was sweeping up to the line again.

The cheers and excited cries broke out afresh at de Lambert's approach. Rising higher and higher yet, till he was a good three hundred feet in the air, he swerved outward directly over the barriers. The crowd, staring straight upward, gasped a little amid their cheers. But this excursion was just to give them a thrill. Sweeping back to the line of the measured course, de Lambert came down to a height of perhaps thirty feet, and continued his flight steadily at that level. He was in for the measured distance prize, and it behoved him to attend to business.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FLYING AT JUVISY (*continued*)

And now two more machines were being rolled up to the starting point, but almost unnoticed by the fascinated crowd. One was a Voisin. The other was a monoplane. The tiny green-and-white flag identified it as a Kœchlin. A new signal ran up beneath de Lambert's, a black globe over a red cylinder.

"That's for Jean Gobron," explained Andrews, consulting his programme. A motor suddenly set up a high, intense hum, mixed with the whirl of a swift propeller. It was quite different from the noise of de Lambert's machine, just now sweeping for the third time past the Grand Stand.

"Yes, that's young Jean Gobron, on his Voisin," said the American. "He'll give us something interesting. He can fly. And he's got a fine motor, made by his father."

"Here he comes," cried Madame, echoed by a chorus of excited voices. The Voisin, a new, bright, spotless machine, raced up at good speed, but seemed unwilling to take the air-path. Still on its wheels, it crossed the starting line. For perhaps fifty yards further it clung obstinately to the ground, and the crowd, satisfied that this was another failure,

turned their attention once more to the persistent flight of de Lambert.

But in the next moment Gobron's machine got up. With beautiful steadiness it mounted. Steadily and gracefully, tilting just to the necessary degree, it swept around the first turn, where the prostrate balloon had been restored to its dignity. The crowd broke into frantic cheers. Gobron became the hero. Persistently he mounted, till he was perhaps a hundred feet in the air. Then he appeared to set out in chase of de Lambert, who was now swooping along the lower end of the course.

By this time there was no wind at all. Every flag hung motionless. The contrast between the two machines was most marked. Instead of the dips and swoops of the frail, flickering Wright—which was now flying near the ground like a skimming marsh-hawk —the substantial-looking Voisin, high above the tree-tops, sailed as steadily as if it were on a track. If not so beautiful as the flight of de Lambert, it appeared more miraculous, and at the same time more secure, more of a confident setting-at-naught of old laws and old notions. The effect of the two machines in the air at the same time set the crowds wild with excitement, and people yelled inarticulately with breaking voices, as one after the other swept by.

"Oh," panted Madame de L'Orme, clutching the rail before her, "I never dreamed of seeing anything so wonderful."

"There *isn't* anything else so wonderful, unless it's yourself, Madame!" answered Andrews.

"There's one thing I don't like about your Wright machine, wonderful as it is," said Prince Sergius, turning abruptly to the American as if impatient at Andrews. "I don't like its lack of a tail. That's what causes all those curtseyings."

"No more do I," agreed the stranger. "And no more do I hold with the Wright boys in regard to their big, slow propellers. Their machine's great. But I think there's a greater."

"I wonder which has the pace?" queried Andrews. "De Lambert looks to be going the faster."

"No," replied the American, "I've been timing 'em. Gobron's got de Lambert by twelve or fifteen seconds on his fastest round."

"Queer that a string of nice new packing-cases should fly faster than a wild duck!" commented Madame.

The American laughed appreciatively.

"You can't always go by looks," said he.

Then a murmur of disappointment went up from the crowd.

"Oh, he's coming down!" cried Madame.

It was Gobron. The great machine, now over by the banks of the Orge, was slanting steadily toward the earth. It landed lightly, ran along the ground with its impetus, and came to a stop just in front of its hangar. It

had been a beautiful flight, if not a long one. And the people cheered. Then their attention went back to de Lambert, who was still flying doggedly round after round.

"He's been fifteen minutes in the air already," said some one behind Prince Sergius.

As Gobron's signal came down from the mast another was run up below de Lambert's. This was a black globe above a black hour-glass, or "diabolo," as Madame de L'Orme dubbed it.

"Who's coming now?" she demanded of Andrews and the programme.

"That's No. 23, René de Nabat on his Kœchlin monoplane," replied Andrews.

"Unlucky number!" muttered the American.

"There goes his motor. He's not losing any time!" said the Prince.

The motor seemed to be all right, and the pilot climbed into his place between the wings. The machine looked something like a less graceful Antoinette. The moment the assistants let go of it, it rushed forward at great speed, and rose before it had got half way to the starting line. It mounted very rapidly. But it rocked precariously from side to side. At the line it was forty or fifty feet in the air—a beautiful and thrilling sight, but terrifying. The crowds held their breath, as if afraid to cheer lest they might destroy that all too uncertain equilibrium. But just beyond the line the pilot started to check the too

daring ascent. The wide wings slanted downward even more rapidly then they had risen. The humming of the motor ceased—evidently shut off by the pilot. The machine came to the ground—gently enough—skimmed along a few paces, then stopped abruptly. Up went its slender tail in the air, like that of a battling dragon-fly, up and up as if it would stand on its head. It would—and did. As a cry of alarm arose from the nearer crowds it buried its nose in the turf, smashing its propeller to bits. De Nabat made a wild leap, lit on his feet, unhurt, and darted aside, expecting the machine to topple clean over. This, however, it decided not to do. Gently it sank down again to a level keel. The crowd drew a long breath.

"Came near being a nasty accident, that!" remarked Andrews.

"I thought he was killed!" murmured Madame, white to the lips.

For a time now the crowd was very quiet, somewhat subdued by the adventure of the monoplane, and content to watch de Lambert as he rolled up round after round to his credit.

"Are you cold? Can't I get you a cup of tea?" asked Prince Sergius.

"No, indeed, thank you!" answered Madame de L'Orme. "I'm too excited to be cold, and I don't want anything at all, but just to watch this wonder, dreamed of in vain till now, since man first lifted his eyes to envy the eagles."

Many of the spectators, however, were less

absorbed in de Lambert, their dull imaginations accepting the miracle as a common thing after watching half a dozen rounds. Rushing waiters wormed their way hither and thither, with trays of cups and glasses. As many of the crowd as could find accommodation moved in to the little tables of the café and restaurant. They came surging and elbowing back again toward the barrier-rail, however, as a long, beautiful monoplane emerged slowly from behind the Club House to the left, and the cry of "*Latham!* Latham!" rippled along the stands. Latham's signal, a red globe topping a white "diabolo," rose slowly to the place beneath de Lambert's.

"*Now,* wait!" muttered Prince Sergius.

But—"Don't be too sure!" warned the American. "It's Latham! But he hasn't got his own machine. This is Captain Burgeat's. His own has gone on to Blackpool."

"But it's an Antoinette!" said Andrews.

"Yes!" agreed the American. "The greatest aeroplane in the world, bar none!"

"You really think so?" demanded Prince Sergius, with great earnestness.

"Sure of it. So sure that when I get home I'm going to put all the money I can scrape together into it. But—I'll have my own motor. Listen to that motor now!"

The propeller on the Antoinette's projecting nose was revolving, but irregularly. The motor was sputtering and missing fire. Busy workmen were tinkering at it, coaxing it, sooth-

ing it, while Latham, the invariable cigarette between his lips, could be seen standing by in an attitude of languid vigilance. The motor was stopped. In a few minutes it was started again. This time, after a sputter or two, it seemed to get its gait. Its note rose to the steady roar which promised good work. Latham lighted a fresh cigarette and mounted to his seat behind the planes. Almost, it seemed, on the moment, the machine darted forward, rocking a little, but steadying itself instantly as if its master had calmed it with a word. Half way to the starting line it rose. Across the line it soared, the great dragon-fly, at a height of perhaps twenty-five feet from the earth. Its flight was beautiful, incomparably. The crowd, which had been dead still with expectation, roared. Then, the throbbing hum of the motor changed. There was a sputtering. Slowly, reluctantly, the machine slanted downward. Half way to the turn it was within five feet of the earth. Then the motor woke up again. The tail-plane waved vigorously. Once more the machine soared upwards. With a lovely, assured sweep it rounded the turn, and resumed its straight course along the south of the field. But it was only for a few moments. Again the ominous sputtering marred the hum—and this time it continued. It slowed to a sharp spitting; and as the machine gently came to earth it stopped altogether. The beautiful dragon-fly ran on lightly over the turf, then struck a soft spot, stopped, and

angrily lifted its tail a few feet into the air. If it had any notion of standing on its head, however, the long projecting antenna under its chin promptly corrected it. Latham, with a resigned air, leaned back in his seat and smoked, waiting for help to come.

"Curse that motor!" growled the American. "Forgive me, Madame, but I *must* say it—Damn that motor!"

"Thank you very much, Monsieur!" responded Madame cordially. "That's just what I was thinking!"

From both the judges' stand and the hangars men came racing across the field to Latham's help. As soon as they arrived he was seen to bend down from his seat and give them some instructions. At once they waved arms in a signal that was apparently not unexpected. A large grey horse, harnessed, and driven by a man with reins, who walked behind him, started out with dignity to the rescue of the aeroplane. The crowd was not slow to comprehend. The horse was greeted with peals of laughter and applause. He stood for the Old Order. Unconcerned and oblivious as antiquity, he tramped down the field to his task, cropping mouthfuls of grass as he went. Before he reached the aeroplane the crowd forgot him. De Lambert, who had been for some minutes quite eclipsed, now swooped into the middle of the field and described a beautiful, unerring figure eight. Then he came delicately to earth just in front of his hangar.

"Twenty-nine minutes in the air," exclaimed aloud, for every one's benefit, those spectators who had been marking his flight with their stop-watches.

For some little time now there was nothing going on. The crowd grew restless, refusing to be interested in the sight of Latham's aeroplane slowly towed back to its hangar by the grave, grey horse. The afternoon was drawing to its close in a calm that was perfection for the flyers; and the people wanted more flights. The sun was just down, and the trees across the further end of the aerodrome were purple-dark against a tender lemon-tinted sky. Further around toward the west the pale tones warmed to orange and salmon-pink, flecked with scattered streamers of thin, purplish rose.

Suddenly the sound of a propeller came from an almost invisible hangar far down by the Orge. A big Voisin aeroplane could be seen rolling up, under its own power, toward the starting point. Presently some one discerned its number, and cried "27!" There was a fluttering of programmes. Then a glad shout of "Paulhan! Paulhan!" ran the length of the grounds. The signal of the daring Southern aviator, a red globe surmounting a black pyramid, floated up the mast.

"If you can be sure of anyone, he's it!" remarked the American, tersely.

Paulhan did not go to the starting-place. Before reaching it he put on full speed, rose

into the air almost at once, and came to the line on a splendid curve. Mounting at a steep slant, he was eighty or ninety feet in the air at the first turn. The crowd yelled themselves hoarse. Smilingly the aviator gazed down and waved his hand. Still he kept on rising. At the further side of the field he was fully a hundred and fifty feet up. Etched black and sharp against the pale glow, he flew as unswervingly as a crane. So steady, so secure seemed his flight, that it gave no sense of apprehension. The machine seemed as safe, as absolutely at home, far up in the tranquil sunset sky, as if it had been rolling on the turf.

Several rounds of the course Paulhan made at this height, then swooping down with a suddenness that brought a gasp of horror from a hundred-thousand throats, he skimmed along near the ground for a few more rounds. Presently he rose again, and swept up to the stands, straight above the heads of the thrilled and shrinking spectators. At last, now once more at a height of perhaps two hundred feet, he forsook the aerodrome altogether, and sailed off over the woods straight into the sunset.

Expectantly the crowd waited and watched, wondering at what point he would reappear. Prince Sergius, seeing that Andrews was intent on Madame, and Madame on the sky where the aeroplane had vanished, turned to the American, and began an interested discussion of the merits of the Antoinette

machine. The unusual heartiness of their agreement on all the most important points drew the two men together so strongly that Prince Sergius took out his card and presented it, saying: "I hope we can see more of each other, since we have such strong mutual interests."

The American took it, and read aloud—"Prince Sergius Charles de Plamenac, M'latza.

"Thanks. Where's M'latza?"

"In Servia," answered Prince Sergius.

The stranger looked at him with new interest.

"I've read up a lot about that disturbing little country of yours. It's caught my fancy. Yes, I hope we can get together and kind of talk things over."

He took out his card, scribbled on it with a pencil, and handed it to Prince Sergius. It read:

Wesley Carver,
Buffalo.

and in pencil

Hotel du Quai D'Orsay, Paris.

"As soon as this show is over," he continued, "I'm going down to Châlons Camp, to study those Antoinettes."

"Why, so am I, Mr Carver!" exclaimed the Prince warmly, holding out his hand.

Next moment he felt a light touch on his arm.

"Oh, *don't* miss it! He's coming back,"

came Madame's voice, tense with excitement.

Black, massive, incomprehensible, high against the mystic sky came the great machine, a portent and a promise, whose full significance the world then hardly dared to guess at. The crowd seemed to feel, all at once, that aspect of the Event. They had begun to cheer at first sight of its return; but as it drew down upon them out of the sunset they fell silent as if at command. At last, as it swept humming over their heads, and they saw young Paulhan gaily and most humanly waving his hand at them, the spell lifted, and their shouts rent the air. Once more around the judges' stand the voyager swept his flight. Then he came softly to the ground before the hangars.

Five minutes more, and the red flag fluttered down from the top of the mast. For that day flying was over.

CHAPTER IX

WHICH MACHINE?

THE crowd was on its feet, trying to get away.

"No use being dragged into that maelstrom!" said Andrews. "Let's stay here in the café and have tea, till the place thins out."

"Yes, I want tea now!" agreed Madame de L'Orme.

"Stay and join us!" said Prince Sergius to the American. He had an intuition that this was a man he was going to need; and he was anxious to assure himself on the point as soon as possible. "Let me present you to Madame de L'Orme, Mr Carver. Mr Carver —Captain Andrews."

"Thank you! Delighted!" said the stranger, shaking hands with Andrews and saluting Madame very formally. "I'm anchored here for an age yet," he continued. "My car's in the very inside corner of that awful bunch out yonder."

Over the tea, which they took in the pavilion, while a sweeping searchlight and ranks of Roman candles illuminated the gathering twilight, the American talked with a frank enthusiasm and unpretentious authority which delighted Madame at once,

and presently won over the more guarded Englishman. His unusually large and beautiful eyes, of that deep, luminous grey, were in striking contrast to his almost harsh, rough-modelled face. Prince Sergius had no difficulty whatever in getting him to talk about himself—a subject in which he was frankly and healthily interested. But his egotism was quite without offence, the whole man being so transparently straight, capable, and well-equipped along his own lines. Prince Sergius speedily drew it out of him that he was a graduate of the Stevens Institute of Technology, a practical as well as theoretical engineer, and a manufacturer of motors. He acknowledged candidly that he had made a little money—but by no means what he needed, and intended, to make.

"I think I've scored, just a little bit, over a good many smart folks," said he, with a boyish pride. "I've secured all the Antoinette rights for a country that's going ahead right now, faster than any other country on this little globe, bar none. That's Canada. *There's* where the money's to be made, now. And the Canadians are the quickest people in the world to know a good new thing when they see it—if it *is* good! They've got imagination for *big* things. They're not afraid to tackle any kind of a proposition. So—well, after I've learned all there is to know about the Antoinette, after I've learned to make it, to fly it, and if neces-

sary to improve it—I'll float a company in Canada, and set up my plant, in Toronto or Winnipeg likely."

"By Jove!" said Andrews, "that looks good, from what I know of the country. I believe I'll take some of that when you're ready, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I'll be wanting capital, all right!" responded the American.

"It certainly interests *me!*" said Prince Sergius. "I'd like to look into the whole idea with you, by and by, if I may be permitted."

"You sure may!" agreed Carver heartily.

"Oh, how interesting it must be to be a man!" sighed Madame. "What chances you have, to do such big, interesting things."

The American surveyed her frankly, appraisingly.

"I reckon it's women like you that *make* it interesting to be a man!" said he.

Madame was unmistakably gratified. There was no gloss on the compliment to disguise or discredit its vigour.

"Curious, isn't it," she remarked, "that you men with such decided interests in common, should just chance to come together this way—among all these thousands."

"Folks *say* I'm lucky!" responded the American readily.

Prince Sergius extended towards him the head of his big, knotted walking stick.

"Knock on wood!" said he.

The American gave him a look of laughing comprehension, and obeyed.

Andrews grinned derisively.

"Oh, you needn't be so superior, Bob!" retorted the Prince. "When it comes to superstition you're the worst old woman of the lot of us. I've seen you spoil a new pair of gloves to pick up a crooked pin."

"All the nicest men," put in Madame *naïvely*, "seem to be like children in some things. Perhaps that's why women like them."

"Well, children don't stand too much on ceremony," said the American. "So I hope *you* won't. I gather that you've come down by train. It'll be particular Hades getting back. I wish you'd all come with me. I've got a big car here—empty! Looks selfish—but I stopped in Orleans last night, and ran up here this morning."

Both Andrews and Madame looked at Prince Sergius.

"Thank you very much," said he without hesitation. "If Madame de L'Orme is willing, we'll be only too delighted and too grateful. But the roads will be a hideous jam?"

"We'll circumvent *that!*" said the American, in a joyous voice. "We'll run over to Fontainebleu; get dinner there, and have a clear road back to Paris."

"Madame de L'Orme is certainly willing and her private opinion is that you are an angel," said the lady with decision.

* * * * * *

Late that night, Plamenac and Andrews were sitting in a snug corner of Fouquet's café on the Champs Elysées, over a good night glass. It was close upon one o'clock. They overheard some one at a nearby table saying that, according to a telephone message just received, the crowds were still dense and furious on the platform at Juvisy, storming to get back to Paris. And they blessed Wesley Carver.

"He's a jolly good sort! You've a keen eye for a man, Serge!" said Andrews.

"I feel it in my bones," replied Plamenac, "that he's the other man we've been needing. I felt it the moment I got a look into those shining eyes of his. He's efficient to the finger tips. At the same time, he's a dreamer. You feel at once that he's 'white all through,' as his countrymen would put it. I'm bound to land him, you see if I don't. He thinks he knows just what he's going to do; but I'm going to make some big changes in his plans, poor chap! And he'll like it, never fear! He'll forget his Canadian Antoinette factory for a while, if I'm not much mistaken in his quality."

"I've no doubt you're right! And you're the commander-in-chief, anyhow. But aren't you, possibly, going just a bit too fast, old chap?" cautioned Andrews.

"Oh, we'll not commit ourselves, not a bit of it, till we *know* him. But you'll see I'm right."

"Then—what now?" suggested Andrews.

"We've got about all we're likely to get out of Juvisy, I'm thinking. And I haven't changed my mind. I'm still for the Farman machine."

"And I'm still for the Antoinette," replied Prince Sergius. "But let's not talk it over here. Let's get back to the hotel and thrash it out in my room, where we won't have to talk under our breath this way. Here, *garçon,* what's the damage?" he continued, having heard the waiter speaking fluent English.

In the Prince's luxurious room, with a fire glowing in the grate, the two men argued earnestly over the respective fitness of their favourite aeroplanes for the task before them.

Finally Andrews said:

"But as we've got to have two machines, anyway—we certainly can't put all our eggs in one basket—why have them of the same pattern? I'll get a Farman, you an Antoinette. That will widen our margin of security a bit, I'm thinking."

"Agreed," said Plamenac. "And now for our programme. Let's get up to Amsterdam at once, to-morrow, and market the stones."

"How will a certain bewitching dame like so sudden a flight on our part?" suggested Andrews.

"No better than *you* will, Bob!" retorted Plamenac.

"I" laughed Andrews. "*Me,* indeed!"

"Of course, I like her—find her most interesting and attractive!" acknowledged the

Prince, with a slight change in his voice. "But we mustn't let *anything* distract us for a moment from our work. I shan't see her—I'll write her in the morning. And I'd advise you to do the same thing, Bob."

Andrews looked inscrutable, and changed the subject.

"And after Amsterdam, what?"

"Why, then straight down to Châlons, to Mourmelon le Grand—both of us," answered Sergius. "The Antoinette people are down there, and so are the Farman people. We'll order our machines, and get to know every screw in them while they're being built. And meanwhile, we'll be learning to fly. *That* will cut out our winter's work for us, Bob. We've got to be nothing less than experts, masters, you know."

"Good, and then?"

"Then, we'll have the job of getting our machines into Servia—to my place at M'latza—where we'll tune them up, and make our final arrangements."

"But will M'latza do?" queried Andrews. "You'll remember, Madame de L'Orme seemed to know all about what you *had* been doing at M'latza. It's my honest opinion, old chap—chaffing aside—that if she took so much trouble to find out something then, she'll take a lot more trouble, and find out a lot more, now."

Prince Sergius looked worried.

"I don't see why she should, Bob!" he protested. "But if it seems advisable, we

can find a place further south, where no one can possibly be any the wiser. We can settle that by and by. You see, we'll be running over to consult with Gregory before spring, and he'll be able to advise us on that point, better than any other living soul."

"Well, we needn't borrow trouble!" said Andrews cheerfully. "Let's return to Châlons. *I'm* going to begin on a Voisin; and I'd advise you to do the same. Of course we'll have to pay by the nose for lessons, if we're not going to be purchasers. But it will be well worth our while."

"Oh, we'll buy one Voisin. That will be better every way," said Plamenac. "We shan't have to count the pennies, you know."

Andrews got up, knocked the long ash of his cigar into the grate, and stretched himself with an air of joyous anticipation.

"I like your programme, old chap," said he, "as far as it goes. And when it goes farther, I expect to like it still better. Now I think I'll turn in, if we've got a journey on for to-morrow."

At the door he turned.

"But say, old chap, I've more than half a notion that we'll find that little lady down at Châlons, too, taking lessons on a Voisin. She's really awfully keen on getting a flyer, you know."

"Well," said the Prince, "if she's there that won't be our fault. I'll help her all I can, of course!"

"Of course, old chap!"

The next afternoon they left the Gare du Nord for Amsterdam. Not till they were nearing St Quentin did Madame de L'Orme's name come up.

"Did you get in to make your adieux?" asked the Prince.

"No," said Andrews, "I didn't. I wanted to. But it occurred to me that I'd have to be either mysterious, or ungracious, or lie to her. I couldn't very comfortably be either one of the three, with those big trusting eyes of hers upon me! So I copied your admirable discretion, and sent a *petit bleu!*"

"I'm glad of it," said Plamenac, heartily.

CHAPTER X

LEARNING AT MOURMELON LE GRAND

At Amsterdam, the matter of the diamonds went without a hitch. Van Heyden, the great diamond merchant and cutter, gasped at the beauty and size of the two stones which Andrews laid before him. But the Englishman's standing and connexions made it unnecessary for him to answer any questions as to where the gems came from. Van Heyden's intense curiosity was altogether pardonable. But when Andrews said: "There are grave reasons, Mynheer, why the origin of these stones should remain a secret for the present," there was nothing more to be said. And when the Englishman added: "There will be others, perhaps, like them; and you shall know all about them," then, not only was the shrewd Dutchman content, but his discretion and his patience were assured.

A week in the quaint old many-watered Dutch capital sufficed to conclude the business.

From Amsterdam, Prince Sergius and Andrews hurried straight to Rheims, by way of Namur, without returning to Paris. They were impatient to get settled down to their work at Mourmelon le Grand. Here they

were overtaken by a letter from Madame de L'Orme, forwarded from the Amstel Hotel at Amsterdam. It was addressed to Prince Sergius, but evidently intended for both. Madame wrote in tears, being suddenly summoned back to Belgrade by her husband, for reasons which she did not specify. But she declared her purpose of returning as soon as possible, and begged that certain amiable promises might not be forgotten. Plamenac drew a breath of relief—but to Andrews it seemed as if his relief were tempered by some other consideration.

"You're not really so pleased as all that, Serge," he jibed. "What is it? Why look so black about it?"

"It's not that, I assure you, Bob!" protested the Prince, seriously. "I was thinking about her husband. I don't like that chap. He's an oily little fat beast, a thorough bounder. He must be rather loathsome to such a woman as she is!"

Andrews laughed hugely and laid an admonitory hand on Serge's shoulder.

"'Tis to consider too curiously to consider so!" he quoted. "Let's hope, for the little lady's sake, it's not so bad as that!"

"You see," continued Plamenac, "I don't trust the brute. I have my suspicions that there's something more than selling champagne that keeps him busy at Belgrade. He runs up to Vienna too often."

"Oh, ho!" said Andrews. "That lively

Austrian curiosity, you think! That might account for Madame's information as to your occupation at M'latza!"

"Impossible!" answered Plamenac, decisively, forgetting certain vague suspicions that had flashed more than once across his mind.

"Impossible, of course, as far as anything of that sort would involve her personally," agreed Andrews, without reserve. "But you forget, old chap, that husbands—even 'oily brutes'—do sometimes tell their wives harmless things that they think may interest them."

"Oh, quit it, Bob! Gentle irony does not become you!" protested Prince Sergius. "We'll write her a joint letter, wishing her all the consolation that Belgrade can afford her at this season."

"And telling her," added Andrews, "that when she gets back she'll find us expert enough to teach her."

At Mourmelon, things were speedily *en train*. With their machines ordered, a Voisin, a Farman, and an Antoinette, both Andrews and Prince Sergius had the run of all three establishments, where they proceeded to familiarize themselves with every detail of their manufacture. All three factories were swamped with orders, and they were told that they could not get their machines before mid-winter. But meanwhile there were the training machines on which to learn.

As they had already decided to do, they

turned their attention first to mastering the Voisin. The instructor, Monsieur Chateau, had the forward planes of the Voisin "schooling machine" so arranged that the learner could not move them far in either direction, thus guarding against too erratic and hasty ascent or descent. To Prince Sergius, partly because of his natural aptitude, partly because of his previous practice with gliders, the handling of this machine seemed to come instinctively. At his first attempt he flew, covering a couple of hundred yards and coming easily to earth. After four more flights he accomplished in excellent form the circular kilometre, after which the instructor left him entirely to himself, to practise as he would. But with Andrews, to his surprise and frank chagrin, it was quite different. An expert at the most varied and divergent sports—skater, swimmer, horseman, tennis-player, automobilist—sure of eye, hand and balance, he had expected to master flying as easily as he had mastered all else he had undertaken. Nevertheless, the capricious aeroplane refused to rise for him. During his first three lessons its front wheels never left the ground. Then, at last, in the fourth lesson, it got up, heavily and reluctantly, and covered perhaps a hundred yards before slinking to earth again, as if with its tail between its legs. For several more lessons—lessons often with days of storm between them—this seemed about all that Andrews could accomplish. He could make, indeed, two or three hundred yards in

a straight line—but with the machine wobbling and swaying so wildly that any attempt to negotiate a turn was quite out of the question. Sergius was keenly disappointed. Monsieur Chateau, the instructor, shook his head, and indicated his serious apprehension that Captain Andrews was not cut out for a flying man—he simply hadn't the turn, the "truc" for it, and was wasting his time. But Chateau didn't know the Englishman. Andrews was annoyed, but he was by no means discouraged. He set his long jaw. "If it's a 'truc' I lack, I'll make one, or steal one!" said he. Then, all at once, it came to him. It was his tenth lesson. Chateau stood by with a weary and supercilious air, which made Plamenac furious. Andrews, however, didn't care how the instructor looked. He grinned resolutely, grasped the wheel, and rolled off.

Curious! To-day for the first time, the machine felt like a live thing under his hand. Before, it had felt clumsy and dead. Now, it was as if he had evolved a new sense. With confidence he tilted the elevating plane—just as far as the stops would let it go. He was not in the least surprised when the great machine rose obediently into the air, and sailed steadily down the field without wavering. When he judged himself to be about fifteen feet up, he lowered the plane a trifle, and with a gentle fanning of it, kept the machine at that height. He heard, from behind him, a yell of approval from Plamenac.

But how easy it had become for him! When he had gone about a quarter of a mile, almost without thinking of it, he began to turn. The machine tilted inwards, but not too much. It came at once to an even keel as he went ahead on his new course. Exultant, but cool as steel, he turned again, and came humming back to where the instructor, Prince Sergius, and half a dozen spectators stood watching. He swept triumphantly past them in a clean curve, and continued his flight. He had caught a sound of vehement applause. Well, he was not done yet. On this round he skirted the field at its widest, now rising slowly to a height of thirty feet or more, now sloping down almost to the ground, testing himself and seeming to remember all at once every bit of direction and instruction he had ever received. Swinging in towards the centre of the field he flew round and round in a circle so small as to hold the machine always a trifle tilted. Never in his life had he felt such a sensation of intoxicating triumph. Yet he knew that his pulse was steady, and his brain clear as a bell. At last he felt himself getting cold. Swooping back to the sheds, he made a perfect landing just before Chateau and Plamenac. The little group was excited, and fell upon him the moment he descended from his seat. The instructor, enthusiastic and repentant, hugged him violently. He saw the keen delight in Plamenac's eyes, though all his friend said, as he wrung his hand, was:

"Bully for you, Bob!"

"I think," said he in a casual tone, "a cup of tea would go pretty well, now."

After this spectacular success, Andrews and Plamenac were almost daily rivals in their flights. They began now practising on other machines—Plamenac on an Antoinette, and Andrews on a Farman—though both returned to the Voisin from time to time. They devoted themselves with special zeal to flying in the wind, and to carrying passengers; and while avoiding flights of great height or duration, which would have called public attention too conspicuously to their performances, they speedily came to be regarded as aviators who would burst into fame at the first great aviation meets of the coming spring. There was nothing, however, of which they seemed less desirous than fame. They vied with each other in modesty, and thereby won immeasurable good-will. When, about the middle of February, their own new aeroplanes were delivered to them, they felt that they might fairly consider themselves equipped for the great adventure.

Meanwhile, all through the winter, their friendship with the American, Wesley Carver, had been growing. Him they had found in the Antoinette factory, in workman's blouse, busy and glad. To the astonishment of Monsieur Levavasseur, the manager of the company and inventor of the machine, Carver insisted on working regular hours and receiving regular wages—even though he was

at work on the very machine which he had himself ordered at a handsome price. He said he wouldn't be an amateur at any price. He would be a real workman, and receive wages, if he had to pay them himself. This rather puzzled and amused Prince Sergius, but it took the Englishman's fancy enormously—it struck him, he said, as being so magnificently "sporty." To the Prince, however, it seemed to further establish his American friend's amazing thoroughness and competence, and so much the more confirmed him in his idea.

Carver being so occupied, they saw little of him in the daytime, but they had gradually dropped into the way of looking him up in the evenings, and of sometimes running over to Rheims with him for dinner. It was not long before Andrews signified to Plamenac his hearty agreement; and thereafter, in the most natural way in the world, the affairs of the Balkans would continually crop up in the conversation. Like so many Americans, even of the most exclusively business class, Carver was full of the sentiment of romantic adventure. They found him already given to biting sarcasm over the impunity with which Turkey was allowed to continue her misrule in Macedonia, and fiercely hot against Austria for her cynical bullying of the little imprisoned kingdom of the Serbs. He was also inclined to rag Andrews rather mercilessly on the score of England, Russia, and France having submitted so meekly to Austria's

affront, and countenanced the shameless rape of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"What would you have had us do?" demanded Andrews one night when Carver had formulated his criticisms rather more concretely and caustically than usual.

"Do?" replied the American with some warmth. "Why, put your foot down so hard it wouldn't budge! Stand pat on the Berlin Treaty! If Great Britain had had the nerve to do that at once, Russia and France would have swung in at her back, and Italy would have served notice that the Triple Alliance was capable of being reduced by one. I believe that would have called Austria's bluff before Germany had publicly committed herself. If it *wasn't* a bluff, and Germany was in it anyway, and you had to fight, you'd have had the advantage of fighting for the right."

"I agree with you thoroughly there," said Andrews. "But I don't think the time was ripe. Russia is still weak; we are not ready; France would have had to bear the brunt of Germany's attack. Both Germany and Austria *were* ready, *are* ready—magnificently ready. The issues at stake were too terrific. We could not afford to let our hands be forced. It would have been playing Austria's game, and Germany's game, quite too simply."

"You'll never have a better chance!" said the American.

"Oh, there you're all off, because you're

not in touch with the vast movement that's going on within the British Empire," explained Andrews. "We're busy trying to get the Empire pulled together, tightened up —federated, in a word. In a very few years, when we've got our forces working together, it won't be a question of what a couple of little islands have to say, but of what half a world has to say. When we get the Empire federated, then we'll be able to keep the peace in the effective way your Roosevelt advocates, and we'll see to it that there's a square deal all round, so to speak."

"Of course," put in Plamenac, "you can't altogether blame Germany. *She* sees, none more clearly, Bob, what the Federation of the British Empire will mean. She wants to strike in time to prevent it. *She* wants Empire herself—a good slice of yours, too! She's full of splendid vigour; she needs room to expand; she longs to appropriate Holland and Holland's colonies. We can sympathize with such desires, even if we don't want them to be fulfilled. But who stands across her path? Great Britain only. Great Britain—a power at present very vulnerable, but about to be born anew as a Colossus. It would certainly be good policy for Germany to prevent that, if possible, before it is too late. For the Federal Republic of the United States, standing beside the Federal Empire of Britain, will make things look very much as if the tongue of Shakespeare were dominating the world."

"That's interesting, by George!" agreed the American. "Well, now, since we're arranging the affairs of the nations, Andrews and me between us, I think we ought to do something handsome for *you*, Plamenac. The least we can do is to hand over Bosnia and Herzegovina to you, right off, and join up Montenegro with you, and give Montenegro back her great harbour of Cattaro—with perhaps a little strip of Dalmatia thrown in, if Austria doesn't take her medicine meekly."

"Thank you, Carver, that happens to be *just* what we want. In the name of my country I accept your kind offer at once," responded Prince Sergius.

"But let me tell you," pursued the American, with a whimsical fervour as if one who had rather seriously amused himself by playing with the map, "seems to me you fellows down there in the Balkans deserve a lot of the troubles you've been having lately. You all seem to be so jealous of each other that you'd rather cut each other's throats than kick out the ancient enemy. Why, if you only had the common sense to get together, Servians, Montenegrins, Greeks, Bulgarians, patch up your squabbles and make a solid Christian league, you might roll up old Turkey like a rag mat and shake her clean out of Europe, over into Asia Minor, where she belongs. There'd be enough territory to divide up and make you all prosperous and happy. And if you could make it worth

while for solid little sit-tight up there north of the Danube, Roumania, to take a hand in the game with you, why your league would hold something like the balance of power between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. You'd get anything in reason out of 'em; and Austria would have to quit her bullying and do some new figuring. I wonder you haven't all thought of it before. Seems to me easy as organizing a Carpet-sweeper Trust."

The American was surprised to find himself taken with grave seriousness. Both the Prince and Andrews were staring at him with an intensity of purpose which half embarrassed him. His modesty forbade him to believe himself qualified to settle off-hand the destinies of nations.

"We *have* thought of it," said Plamenac, gravely. "In fact, it has simply *got to be done.*"

"Oh well, of course," said Carver, lightly, "what you say goes, in this affair. So Andrews and I will attend to it at once. But meanwhile let's have another drink. You fellows look as solemn as if we were in church."

The Englishman leaned to him far across the table, and said softly: "I take you at your word, my friend! We *will* attend to it, so far as lies within our utmost power!"

Carver's brows wrinkled, and he glanced from one to the other. Plamenac's eyes were blazing with an exaltation that thrilled him in spite of himself.

"You fellows beat *me!*" he muttered in whimsical bewilderment. Then he suddenly realized that something big was in the air, and his luminous eyes grew eager as a boy's.

"Old chap, what you have planned for Servia and for the other Balkan States, in joke," said Plamenac in a low voice, "that we have set ourselves seriously to do. Power, enormous power, has been miraculously put within our reach. We have but to stretch out our hands to grasp it. We have needed another man—a strong man, a straight man—above all, the *right* man. When I met you at Juvisy, I felt that you were the man. Andrews feels about it as I do. We want you with us in this great adventure. I'm sure I don't have to assure you that it's clean. And vaster destinies than those of my little country are bound up in it. We want you to come and help us."

Carver's face had grown very grave during this amazing speech.

"Thank you for your confidence!" he said simply. "I can see what it means, for you to have spoken so freely to me. It looks mighty tempting to me—any sort of an adventure would look tempting to me, if it meant going into it with you fellows. But, I can't run my motor in the dark without head-lights. Before I say yes or no, I must know just what we're going to be up against. Then, if my business—I'm not altogether free, you know—if my business won't let me

go in with you, it will be just as if you hadn't told me."

"Of course," replied Prince Sergius, "you have to know all about it before you can decide."

"But you've decided already. I know you, Wesley Carver, and you can't keep out of it, at any cost. *I* couldn't," broke in Andrews. "Why, man, it's what you came over for."

"Have a cigar! You'll find them all right!" said Carver, coolly, holding out his case.

Then Prince Sergius began. First he sketched, briefly but glowingly, the story of Servia, her splendours, her disasters, her imperishable dreams, the perils now surrounding her—the last of which Carver well knew. Then the tradition of the Black Stone. Then the treasure, and their daring schemes for getting it safely into Servia. How it might, thereafter, be used in reconciling Servian, Greek, and Bulgar, freeing Macedonia and Thrace, and forcing the Turk out of Europe, and then, perhaps, be turned into a lever for prying Austria out of Bosnia, heaving a mountain against her southward march, and throwing the scattered Servian people together into one great nation—all this he but suggested, those being problems for later consideration and far-seeing statesmanship. As he talked, the American's great grey eyes began to flame with dancing lights. At the end of the story he stretched

himself, drew a prodigious breath, and relighted his cigar.

"I reckon," he remarked at last, "my aeroplane factory in Toronto will have to wait a while. There's things going on over here that seem too good to miss."

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Some three weeks after this decisive conversation, the three new aeroplanes, after having responded satisfactorily to the most searching tests that Andrews and Prince Sergius could put them to, were taken apart and boxed ready for shipment. The Voisin was consigned directly to Prince Sergius himself at M'latza, by way of Vienna and Belgrade.

"This will give the Austrian spies something to find out," said the Prince, "and keep them happy. They'll watch that Voisin to its destination, and perhaps I'll amuse them with it by and by, when we think they ought to have their attention occupied."

"We might let it leak out that there's some grand smuggling scheme afoot, and they'll keep their eyes on that Voisin till they hypnotize themselves," laughed the Englishman.

As for Plamenac's Antoinette and the Englishman's Farman, it was decided that they should go by different routes. The Antoinette was to go by way of the Mont Cenis Tunnel, across Italy to Venice, and thence by water to the Montenegrin port of Dulcigno, where it was consigned to one

Allessandro Mosso, bicycle agent—and also incidentally, agent and ally of Gregory Nicolaievich and the free bands. Gregory would be on hand at Dulcigno, and would see to getting the unwieldy freight safely through the mountains up to Niksich—which secluded Montenegrin town had been chosen as a base of operations. For the Farman machine a rather more elaborate programme was arranged. Andrews decided that it should go by water, from Marseilles, all the way around through the Dardanelles to Kustendji on the Black Sea, the chief port of Roumania. It was consigned to himself at Bucharest, where a certain potent "pull" which he had with the Government would enable him to avoid undue curiosity on the part of the Roumanian Customs. From Bucharest he would himself superintend the long and troublesome transport of the aeroplane up the Danube to the Servian frontier, and thence across to the safe seclusion of Niksich. It was more or less intricate and troublesome, but seemed to appeal to the Englishman's imagination more than any other route.

They were on the eve of getting away—Andrews for Bucharest, Plamenac and the American for Slavonia, where they would look over the lay of the land—when came a letter from Madame de L'Orme, dated from Vienna. It was addressed, as usual, to Prince Sergius; but, in accordance with that impartial *camaraderie* which Madame had so

tactfully established, it was manifestly intended for both men. It announced her purpose of coming at once to Paris, and beginning her lessons without further delay. The Prince, with a troubled look on his dark face, handed the letter over to Andrews.

"Oh, but we must head her off, instantly," exclaimed Andrews, who now was growing day by day more impatient. "If she comes to Paris she'll come down here. And if she comes down here, she'll find out that we've been getting *three* machines, and packing them all off in different directions. And if a lady's husband is mixed up with the Austrian Secret Service, it's just as well that a lady should not know too much."

"He might get things out of her without her suspecting that it was going to do us any harm," agreed Prince Sergius. "What had we better do?"

Such indecision was so unlike the wont of his prompt and positive friend, that Andrews laughed outright.

"Do? Why, wire her at once, to-night, that we'll meet her day after to-morrow in Vienna. That will fix things for the moment. She'll wait. Then, old chap, you can deal with the situation more exhaustively when you see her."

"*We* can," corrected the Prince. "Yes, we will tell her we've got a Voisin at M'latza, and will give her lessons down there."

But in this hope they were to be dis-

appointed. Madame de L'Orme, for reasons that did not seem to them very clear, was unable to await them in Vienna, and for some weeks they heard no more of her.

PART II

CHAPTER I

TSCHERNAGORA

SPRING comes late to the Balkans—for a land of the same favoured latitude as Rome and Barcelona. But it had come, and established its kingdom, before Andrews arrived with his charge at the camp on a tributary of the Drina, where Prince Sergius, Carver, and Gregory Nicolaievich had been awaiting him for more than three weeks. The outlaw —he was no outlaw in Montenegro, but a highly honoured citizen—was one of those rare men who could induce his valorous, but most unindustrious, compatriots to work. He had accomplished marvels, by letting his workmen suspect that there was a military purpose behind their toil—which toil forthwith became honourable in their proud eyes. In accordance with the plans and minute directions forwarded to him by Prince Sergius, he had got two spacious hangars ready to receive the machines, as well as a rough but sufficing workshop to accommodate the tools, materials, and spare parts which the American had brought with him. The site which Gregory had chosen for the camp was a good twenty miles from Niksich,

near a hamlet buried in the mountains. At this spot the valley-bottom was about two miles in width, flat, grassy, and treeless. It was perfect for aeroplane practice—and remote from prying eyes. As for the country folk, it needed but a hint from Gregory that the enemies of Montenegro would like to know what was going on, and straightway the most garrulous tongue was sealed to silence.

While waiting for Andrews to arrive, there was infinite occupation for Prince Sergius and Carver. First, the outlaw had to be made free of the air. From his first sight of the white-winged monoplane soaring up and down the valley, and butting into the squalls like a sea-eagle, he was a slave to the game. For a few days he was like one possessed, and could neither sleep nor eat till he had flown. It did not content him in the least to be carried aloft by the Prince or by Carver. He must do it himself. Very cautiously and gradually they taught him. He proved an apt pupil, but quite too recklessly daring. They could not let him take the machine out alone, but only with Prince Sergius sitting watchful and repressive in the seat behind him. And as soon as he had learned, they would let him fly no more.

"We *must not* risk this precious machine in your wild hands, my Gregory," decreed Plamenac. "We must think of but one thing, till that one thing shall be accomplished. *Then,* why you shall have this very

machine all to yourself, and may soar up to play with the eagles of the Tschernagora* to your heart's content, while we are off peddling diamonds to buy you gunpowder. Meanwhile, patience, my friend."

At Vienna, Prince Sergius had collected a series of large-scale topographical maps, which covered not only the whole of Southern Hungary, Slavonia, and Bosnia, but Servia and Montenegro and the Sanjak of Novi Bazar as well. It was evident that Austria took the liveliest interest in the topography of her Balkan neighbours—but this somewhat ominous fact proved of the greatest service to Prince Sergius. By their aid, he and Carver were able to pick out with confidence several alternative routes between Pravnitza, the town nearest to their objective, and their retreat in Montenegro. Then, as casual tourists, they had run over the ground, right up to the hamlet of Slovich. But they had refrained, with stern discretion, from wandering out to Mother Maria's pig-farm and verifying Gregory's diagram. They went near enough to distinguish, by aid of their glasses, the cabin in the hollow, the grey rock to the north of it, and a solitary pine-tree neighboured by several scattered oaks. Also, they made out certain enclosures, and many pigs. It was enough, and Prince Sergius felt his heart beat suffocatingly as he turned away.

Returning to Pravnitza without having

*Tschernagora is the Montenegrin name for their country—the land of the Black Mountain.

attracted special comment, they had journeyed back to the Save in leisurely fashion, making apparently idle excursions to this side and that of their line of travel, and fixing prominent land-marks in their memory. Coming down through Bosnia they moved with special circumspection; and at length, before approaching the Montenegrin frontier, they had turned sharply aside from their route, and made eastwards across Servia toward the Morava. Once, at the Servian frontier, they had been threatened with annoyance by the curiosity of an Austrian patrol; but the tact and the passport of Prince Sergius, combined with Carver's blameless Americanism, had carried them through. At M'latza they had halted for a week, to get the spare machine unpacked and put together, though the meadow-lands around Plamenac's place were not yet fit for flying. Then they had to come to join Gregory at Niksich by way of the Sandjak. The southern part of their prospective route they had left to be explored, more securely, from its southern end, under the skilled guidance of Gregory and his followers. As this part of Bosnia was being held down severely by the Austrians, and swarmed with Austrian spies, its exploration would be a matter for nicest discretion.

By the time Andrews arrived with his Farman, the valley fields and the lower slopes were blue-misted with incomparable violets; and though the brooks still ran swollen and

icy from the melting of the mountain snows, the magic of high spring was over the land. After the machine was put together, there came several weeks of test-flying, for wind, speed, and height, with the exact weights which would have to be carried. It was planned that Prince Sergius should take Carver with him in the monoplane, while Gregory should go with Andrews in the Farman. This was not altogether to the outlaw's taste, as the great biplane made no such appeal to his imagination as the bird-like monoplane. But it was the inevitable division, for every reason. Andrews was by far the heaviest man of the four, his tall frame tipping the beam at fourteen stone four; while the lean Montenegrin went a scant ten stone. Carver and Plamenac, on the other hand, were men of from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and sixty pounds weight. Again, Prince Sergius and Gregory were the two who knew the country thoroughly, and had eyes trained to the peculiarities of the landscape; so it was obviously well that their knowledge should be divided between the two aeroplanes. Lastly, the Englishman had much of that turn for mechanics, that instinct in the hands, that intuitive comprehension of machinery, which was so highly developed in Carver, and so lacking to both Prince Sergius and Gregory. And thus it was that fate decreed the division.

In the Antoinette, Prince Sergius had substituted a hundred horse-power Gnome

motor for the fine, but frail, motor of Levavasseur's invention. The form of this motor gave somewhat more space in the front body of the machine, both for petrol and for baggage—and this additional weight served to balance the passenger, whose seat was placed directly behind that of the pilot. The Farman machine proved to be a triumphant weight-carrier. Its great tank filled with petrol enough for a five hours' flight, it carried unprotestingly, in addition to its heavy pilot and its passenger, a box of repair tools, two repeating rifles, and a supply of ammunition. With all this weight its Gnome motor, of eighty horse-power, drove it at a rate of just under forty miles an hour. The Antoinette was good for a clean sixty when put to it; but she could not accommodate more petrol than enough for a three hours', or at best a three and a half hours', flight. Her extra baggage, therefore, was reduced to one rifle and a 38-Colts, with ammunition, and two Thermos bottles for hot coffee ; while all extras, which it might be found necessary, at the last moment, to take, were to be handed over to the willing Farman.

A few days before the arrival of Andrews, however, something had happened to make Prince Sergius uneasy. There came to the village a Jewish pedlar, who displayed an immense amount of interest in aeroplanes. Of course, it was not surprising that he should be interested; and though his anxiety to penetrate the sacred enclosure which

fenced the hangars was rather firmly repressed, no one had the least objection to his attending on the flights and gazing at them to his heart's content. When, however, he fell into the error of questioning the villagers as to the aim and intent of all this wonder-work, the villagers took alarm. Of course, they could not tell him, for they themselves did not know. But they did know there was some righteous reason for their ignorance. And they felt it was not good for a stranger to be so inquisitive. They forthwith began to notice that, for a pedlar, this stranger was singularly indifferent to the prosecution of his calling. So unnatural a Jew was a problem demanding solution, so they propounded him to Gregory and to Prince Sergius. The pedlar's investigation of aeronautics was cut short. He was led by the duly instructed villagers for some distance on the road back to Niksich, and effectually advised against return. It was a small matter, but it put Gregory sharply on his guard. He set pickets several miles beyond the village, who scrutinized every wayfarer; and within the next two weeks a phenomenal number of pedlars, strollers, and unaccounted-for persons came that way. With ruthless disregard of the rights of the highway, they were inexorably turned back. But the circumstance of their coming was disquieting. Prince Sergius became convinced that he was being spied upon, and grew eager to push matters to a conclusion before

his invisible adversaries should have time to guess too much.

The four men now held conclave assiduously over the maps, and at last came to a decision on the route. Outwards, it was to follow the valley of the Drina through the mountains into Bosnia, past Fotcha, and again through the mountains past Vishegrad, both of which towns would be given a wide berth. Once well past Vishegrad, they would leave the Drina and follow the widening plains north-westward toward the river Bosna, which would be crossed a little above its junction with the Save. They would cross the Save well to the west of the town of Brod, and then, once in Slavonia, make an air line to their destination. This route was not by any means the most direct one. They could save a third of the distance, at least, by following the great central valley of Bosnia, past Serajevo. But this was rejected as too hazardous. By the other they would pass hiding-places of the free bands, where Gregory could store reserves of petrol, and summon help in case of need. As for Slavonia, though for generations it had been full Austrian in name, it was almost pure Serb in blood and sympathy; and there, too, eager allies would spring up on call. For the return journey, the one aim would be to get over the Servian frontier as soon as possible. The objective, therefore, would be the junction of the Save and the Drina. Once safe among the warlike, Austria-hating

peasantry who till the rich fields between Shabatz and the Drina, the Great Adventure would be achieved. The problem thereafter —the problem of arming and fortifying a rich Servia and a boundlessly rich Montenegro, and of winning the co-operation of Bulgaria and Greece, without stirring up trouble in the process—that would be one for statesmanship rather than adventure. It was a problem, of course, which passionately concerned Prince Sergius, and one which he was continually thrashing out with Andrews. It was his intention to set his mark on the map of Europe with so broad a brush that Aerenthal's experiments in cartography would look like kindergarten work. But this was a subject on which he could not look for advice to either Gregory Nicolaievich or the American. So he gave them no reason to think that, for the moment, he was considering it.

The route finally selected, Gregory went north with a company of tried followers to see to the placing of petrol and food supplies at certain points along the way. It was a task for strategy; but with the resources at his command the wary guerilla-leader was not likely to fail in it. In his absence, Andrews, Prince Sergius, and the American busied themselves with the drawing of special duplicate maps, on a staring scale, for use during the flight. The maps were left naked of every detail that could be spared. All necessary land-marks were designated upon them

in such fashion as to make them more easily recognizable when seen from overhead. For one of the hardest things in the world for the aviator to get used to is the difference between a bird's-eye view and the view that greets the eyes of the plodder upon earth's surface.

Two days after Gregory's departure there came a letter to Prince Sergius from Madame de L'Orme. It was addressed to M'latza, and had been forwarded promptly by the Prince's overseer, because it was marked *immediate,* and also *urgent.* It announced Madame's return to Belgrade, and begged the fulfilment of certain unforgotten promises. She was anxious to come at once to M'latza, with her maid, and she felt confident that she was ready to do credit to her kind instructors—she put it in the plural, she said, because she expected to find Captain Andrews at M'latza, having heard of his recent visit to Bucharest and his departure for Servia. This was the gist of the letter itself, but, naturally, there was also a postscript.

When he had read the letter aloud to Andrews, about half way through he looked up with a smile of content, and remarked: "We'll have to think of some nice way to postpone her trip for a week or ten days; but it will be pleasant, Bob, to have the little lady down at M'latza for a bit when we get back. We'll be feeling pretty slack when this is all over, and she'll be a godsend."

Without waiting for his hearer's endorsa-

tion of this sentiment, which easily went without saying, he ran his eyes on hastily and in silence to the end of the letter. But when he came to the postcript he turned a little pale, sprang to his feet, read the scrawled lines over again, and thrust the letter abruptly into the Englishman's hand. Recovering himself on the instant, he sat down again, and asked in a quiet voice: "What do you think of that, Bob?"

This was the postscript:

"If you are not at M'latza, I hope this will be forwarded to you *instantly*. And if you are engaged in anything *very important, please* do not go on with it. You are being watched. You are in danger. *Please do nothing* until I see you."

Andrews read the postscript in silence. Then he read the letter. Then he read the postscript again, turned the paper over in his fingers, and stared with inward eyes at the blank back page.

"What do you make of it?" demanded Sergius.

"Just what you do, no doubt!" answered Andrews. "I'm no Sherlock Holmes. I think it's just as she says. We *are* being watched. And we *are* in danger—naturally enough. And she's got wind of it, through some confidence or indiscretion of that interesting husband of hers. She's a good pal, all right—so she has warned us. I can't see any deeper into a millstone than that. Can you?"

Plamenac's face had been very white, and his mouth grim. An ancient suspicion had thrust itself upon him. But as Andrews spoke his expression relaxed.

"No!" said he. "That's the whole of it, no doubt; and she's doing her best for us in sending this word. Unless——"

Here he hesitated, and bit his moustache.

"Unless what?" demanded Andrews.

"Unless nothing!" responded Sergius with sudden decision. "It was a fool notion, a rather damn fool notion, and I won't stultify myself by giving it breath. The question is, what to do. Go right ahead? Or see her first, and find out what more she knows?"

"Not likely she knows anything more, or she'd have told us all about it!" said Andrews, who was foolishly persuaded that he understood women to some extent. "If Gregory were back I'd vote for action first, and information afterwards."

"Shouldn't wonder if you were right. Let me see. About where did we calculate that Gregory would be operating to-day?"

"It's one of those ingenious names that look like something else. It has slipped my mind, but you've got it in your notebook," answered Andrews. "Anyhow, he said he'd be at Mother Maria's to-morrow night, you know."

"Yes," said Prince Sergius. "Well, now, I've got an idea. But I like to let it ripen for an hour or two before I expose it to your critical eye. Suppose you get hold of Carver

and lay the situation before him. I'll go and take old Ivan for a flight. He's keen as mustard to go up, and I've promised it to him. You know he's got an eye like an hawk. Then after lunch we three will hold a conference."

At the meal Prince Sergius was dumb, but there was an excitement in his eyes which led Andrews and Carver to look for something interesting. When chairs were pushed back, and Andrews had lighted his black briar, and Carver had satisfied himself that his cigar was up to the mark, then the Prince rolled himself a cigarette. But he forgot to light it. He used it as a pointer, to fix unsure objectives in the air.

"Here's my plan!" he began without preliminary. "If you fellows don't like it, fall upon it. First, as to Madame de L'Orme. We'll send her a wire from Niksich this afternoon, just as soon as a messenger can get over there, telling her simply that we will meet her in Belgrade next Friday or Saturday, and take her down to M'latza. This is Tuesday."

"But *will* we?" queried Andrews.

"We can but do our best!" answered Plamenac. "Then—— well, you see, there's no wind! The moon's full! To-night we'll start for Slovich!"

The American blew a long column of smoke from between his lips.

"Right!" said he. "When in doubt, trump!"

"It looks good!" assented Andrews. "It

would seem safer than waiting. And the Austrians are apt to be a bit slow. But what about Gregory?"

"Why, if things work out right—and they've got to—we'll pick him up at Mother Maria's, with other things."

"All right!" agreed Andrews. "But you'll have to keep by me, or I'll get lost; for I won't be able to use the maps when I'm alone—nor a gun, very well, if there *should* be any little misunderstanding. I'm going to miss Gregory's company a lot."

"I'll send Ivan with you!" said the Prince. "That's why I took him up this morning, to get him used to the motion. He'll get the hang of the maps in five minutes; and he's one of the best shots in all Tschernagora. He's been decorated by Nicholas for his shooting—and Nicholas doesn't thrown away decorations, or anything else. You'll be all right with Ivan, who admires you immensely, and believes that England is almost as great as Montenegro."

"Well, to-night it is, then, old chap," said Andrews. "And power to your elbow!"

The craggy face of the American suddenly worked with strong excitement, and his big grey eyes fairly flamed. "We'll stand to your back, Andrews and I, I reckon," said he in a voice from which all emotion was scrupulously dried out. "You're all right, Plamenac."

Sergius started to thank them, but the words stuck in his throat. At last he

muttered : "Well, there's one good thing about me, and that's my friends !" Then he got up hastily, and went out to send his wire to Madame de L'Orme.

CHAPTER II

RUNNING THE AIR

At midnight, exactly, both aeroplanes were run out of their hangars, and the doors locked behind them. Then, within the shelter of the high-fenced enclosure, the motors were given a final test, and everything aboard was minutely checked off to see that there had been no oversight. At last the wide gates were thrown open, and the great white biplane was rolled out into the practice field. The long, low, silvery form of the Antoinette, the spectre of a giant dragon-fly, came crawling sluggishly after. Behind the machines the gates of the enclosure were locked. The hangars were to remain conspicuously guarded, that they might seem still occupied.

The night was one of spring's most divine enchantment. A full moon, honey-yellow in a faintly purplish sky, swung just above the mountain ridge which bounded the valley on the east. There was no wind, but from time to time the scent of violets came in vast, slow puffs across the silvered fields, as if the valley sighed in sheer content. But mild as was the night at the valley level, all four voyagers were clothed as for winter travel, warmly gloved and booted, and with hoods buttoned

under their chins; for spring is a sluggard when it comes to mountain-climbing.

Each aeroplane carried a powerful acetylene head-light; and bright as was the moon, these lamps were lighted, in case there should be need to choose a landing-place suddenly on shadowed ground. But lighted though they were, their betraying glare was not in evidence; for the ingenious American had fitted them each with a metal shutter or blind, operated by a cord from the passenger's seat. Besides these lamps there was also a tiny but brilliant acetylene lamp attached under the hood of each passenger seat, for use in consulting the compass, the maps, the barometer, and the speed-gage.

Having the slower machine, Andrews was to get away first. Without a word he climbed into his seat. Old Ivan followed alertly, and the first thing he did on gaining his place was to see that his rifle was exactly ready to his hand. The American's vigilant eyes took note of the gesture, and smiled approval. To him it stood for the instinct which had kept Montenegro invincible.

A few directions were given in strained, unnatural voices. The motors roared, and the propellers set up their mystic drone, which straightway begat all manner of marvels upon the dreaming moonlight. Every man present felt that he stood face to face with Destiny, at a moment when she was about to change the roll of events. Just exactly why these four men—two of them strangers to their

blood—were starting north upon the air, none of the willing and loyal helpers could have told. But they knew it was for the confusion of their foes and for the glory of their fatherland; and that was enough. Every man of them, with his proud mountaineer's imagination, knew himself at that moment the actor in a drama which would presently have the world for audience. Every man of them, as they stood clustered solemnly about the quivering and throbbing aeroplanes, remembered Kossovo, and dreamed he stood on the threshold of a day that would wipe out that black name from the heart of the Serb.

"I'm all ready, Serge."

The voice of Andrews, cool, crisp, decisive, struck as clear across the noise of the motors as if they had been still.

"All right, Bob. Go ahead!"

The commonplace words came slowly, weightily. To Carver they sounded like the promulgation of some portentous decree. The face of Prince Sergius, as he spoke, was in shadow, beside the lofty *empennage* of the biplane.

"Let her go!" rang out the command of the Englishman, as if he were leading his company into battle.

The machine swept forward with a rush for some forty or fifty yards, then sailed majestically into the air. Rising steeply to a height of perhaps a hundred feet, it flew off down the valley toward the V-shaped pass where the river broke through its prisoning mountains.

Every one watched it breathlessly till it was no more than a mist-wraith in the illusive light. Then Plamenac climbed into his machine, where Carver was already seated with a big cigar between his teeth.

The Prince settled himself methodically, seeing that everything he could need was exactly to his hand. He leaned sideways and gave ear to the high drone of motor and propeller.

"She's working smooth as silk, Plamenac," said the American, in a tone of intense satisfaction.

Prince Sergius turned and gazed at him for a moment or two in an amiable but absent-minded fashion. Then all at once his face changed, and he seemed to swallow hard. Tears came into his eyes. He thrust his hand back over the seat and gripped the American's gloved paw.

"God!" he muttered—and the expletive sounded like a prayer. "I don't see what I've done to deserve that two such chaps as you and Andrews should stand by me this way. Old man, it must mean that God intends I should succeed. Don't you see it? It's clear!"

Carver chewed hard on his cigar till the glowing tip described a wobbly circle; and he returned the grip of Prince Sergius with vigour. Otherwise he made no reply. None, indeed, seemed necessary. Dropping his hand, Prince Sergius glanced around at the men. Then, looking up at the pale stars, he

lifted his hands for an instant in a gesture of invocation, and the mountaineers clutched off their caps.

Then—"Let her go, my friends! And pray for us!" said he. The monoplane darted forward with such a rush that it seemed she was in the air at the first instant. Steady and unswerving she swept upward, the ground seeming to sink away as it slid beneath them. "About five hundred feet!" reported Carver, presently.

Sergius brought her to her level, and flew after the other aeroplane at top speed down the valley.

"Never before, in the history of the world," he cried—and the words stormed into Carver's ears with the roar of the wind and the motor—"never before have men gone forth upon such an adventure as ours."

"I was just thinking that same," replied the American.

In a few minutes the humming thunder of motor and propeller with its wide, vague rhythm, merged into the night and was forgotten. Beneath them the little river, full fed and tranquil, streamed backward in loops and coils of shining silver between the rich dark of new ploughed fields and the variable sheen of billowed leafage. But even the darkness of the ploughed fields was not really dark, except by comparison. Rather was it simply a softer, deeper pallor in the widespread brightness. Nothing was really dark except the shadows—narrow trimmings of

black along the north-westward edges of cabin and thicket, curious blobs of black appended to the scattered trees. Toward the foot of the valley the fields rose into gracious slopes and foot-hills; and here came soft, great breaths of fragrant air puffing up to meet them; till the dragon-fly rocked as she flew. Two or three times she settled suddenly—but without rolling or pitching—as if some vast support was furtively withdrawn. And again, as suddenly she was fanned higher into the air, as a child might blow a feather. But all the time she flew true, and the pace she marked was at the rate of fifty miles an hour. The men she was carrying tingled to the speed and perfection of her flight, to the wonder and the splendour and the mastery of it.

"If an arrow were turned into a hawk, it might fly like this," yelled the American, gripping his seat. He spoke close at Plamenac's ear.

"Yes," cried back the other, with the wind of their flight at his teeth. "It's the long *empennage* that does it. Makes her like an arrow."

"We don't seem to be overhauling Andrews very fast," went on Carver, a minute later. "But how he's mounting! He must be fifteen hundred feet up!"

"He's finding air-vortices, likely, there in the mouth of the pass, and trying to get above them," answered Sergius. "We may as well follow suit. Saves time and petrol not to fight air-currents."

He slanted upwards steadily, and entered the pass at a height of two thousand feet. Here, there was full calm; for the crests were wide apart. Below, the gorge was in blackness, with the river, now a torrent, shining up through it, a ribbon of white foam. They were overtaking Andrews rapidly now, for they could see from the swervings of his machine that he was meeting adverse gusts at the turn of the gorge. Ten minutes more and they were almost above him, and having no gusts at all to butt against. At this moment Andrews came slanting upwards. After a rise of a couple of hundred feet he shook off the whirling adversaries. At once his speed returned; but he kept on mounting till he reached the level of the Antoinette. Then the two machines flew on side by side, about a hundred yards apart. Prince Serguis slowed down to keep from forging ahead.

"He's doing a good thirty-nine," said Carver. "The best he's ever got out of her! The Gods are with us!"

"We need them!" answered Prince Serguis, fervently. "We'll be crossing the frontier in some fifteen minutes at this rate. What's that down there to the left, across the gorge, on that bit of open field away above the shadow? Is it two little patches of white?"

Carver levelled his glasses.

"Yes, I make it. It's the two white shoots that Gregory was to peg down at a good landing place, where he'd hid some petrol. Good old Gregory! Ah, and there go the

two fires the watchers were to light as soon as they heard or saw us coming, if the coast was clear."

Two slender cones of brush fire, about fifty feet apart, were just flaming up, conspicuous from the height at which the adventurers were flying, but so placed behind the woods as to be little in evidence from the lower levels.

"If we'd had a head wind, we'd have needed the stuff by this time," said Sergius. "But we're good for nearly two hours yet, if this calm holds."

About fifteen minutes later the Prince spoke again.

"There's the elbow of the gorge, where the boundary line crosses the river. Once over that, and we're in the enemy's country. The Austrians have a patrol on both sides of the river. We'll open up their camp-fires in half a minute. There! I think we'd better get up another four or five hundred feet."

"Shall I signal Andrews?" suggested Carver.

"No! Ivan will explain. And he'll follow us up quick enough."

By the time the aeroplanes were over the line they were not much less than three thousand feet in the air. The moon was almost overhead. Staring down with awe from that terrific height, Carver noted the black shadows of the two aeroplanes sweep across the open space before the tents of the patrol. He saw tiny figures—could such mites be men?—rush out from the tents, aroused by

that portentous humming in the sky. He lifted his glass. As he brought the camp into its field he ripped out an indignant oath.

"The dirty dogs!" he added. "They're going to fire on us!"

"They'll not find us much of a target!" said Prince Sergius, with composure.

From the group before the tiny tents came a flash of keen, pale light. As for the bullet, it may have gone anywhere—its whine had been drowned in the great drone of the propellers. The next moment came a flash from the other aeroplane. And Carver, who had been watching the camp intently through his glass, saw the lifted rifle drop from the grasp of the man who had shot at them.

"By George, that Ivan can shoot!" cried the American. "He's hit the beggar in the hand, or the arm—and serve him d—— well right, potting at us that way without any excuse whatever."

"Ivan couldn't be expected to let that insult go unavenged," answered Prince Sergius. "But I hope Andrews won't let him waste any more cartridges. We're here to run, not to fight—unless we get cornered. The less gun-practice up here in the heavens the better."

Apparently Andrews was of the same opinion, for, doubtless much against his will, the old Montenegrin made no further display of his marksmanship. Nor did the Austrians fire again. They had probably found that shot from the sky discouraging.

A few minutes later, being well beyond range of any frontier patrol, Sergius sloped his great dragon-fly down to the fifteen-hundred-foot level, the big white biplane swooping after him. Almost immediately the gorge widened to a spacious valley. Then the mountains on the right came to an end, in an abrupt and towering spur, and the adventurers swept out over a broad, glimmering plain. Their elevation now, on a sudden, came to seem to them stupendous. They ran swiftly down a long declivity of air, and flew level again at a height of not more than eight or nine hundred feet. The plain, with its scattered farmsteads, slept profoundly in the flooding moonlight; and the air was as currentless as a forest pool. The river, forgetful of its tumult in the mountains, once more slipped waveless and silvery between tilled shores.

Following on down the river, they presently made out the scattered and feeble lights of dreaming Fotcha. Immediately Prince Sergius turned his course sharp to the right, giving wide berth to the town and cutting off a long curve of the river. Holding their course true by the compass, he struck the river again some twenty miles further on. Following it closely, as the one sure guide in the featureless Bosnian plan, new mountains, at first a formless shadow in the moonlight, presently loomed into shape before them. The river led them close round the base of a southward jutting shoulder, dense with oak-forest.

Along the skirts of the wooded height lay frequent patches of meadow and pasture. Here Sergius dropped again, till his flight was not more than a couple of hundred feet above the tree tops.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Twelve past three," announced Carver.

"Keep your eyes open," admonished Sergius. "Petrol's nearly out. And Gregory was to have established one of his depôts about here."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when a little ahead, and far to the left, the light of a small fire glowed through the trees. A few seconds more and another fire revealed itself, very near the first.

"Doesn't look a very likely place for a landing!" said Carver, peering through his glass. "But we're too low to see. Better swing aloft."

"All right," responded Sergius. The dragon-fly shot upward, circling around toward the left. At a height of five hundred feet a lonely patch of upland meadow opened out, a sort of amphitheatre islanded in deep woods. There at the back of it burned discreetly the two signal fires, and near them two square white patches on the ground. Circling widely, like the fishing eagle, the two aeroplanes descended over the meadow, one about a hundred yards behind the other. Three men stood watching beside one of the fires. At a height of not more than twenty feet above the ground, Sergius made a complete

circuit of the meadow, satisfying himself that it afforded good landing. Then, gently as an alighting snipe, he came to earth just in front of the fires. Half a minute later the biplane ranged up abreast of him, not two score yards away.

Instantly the watchers beside the fires began to scatter them, and subdue them with earth, till they were reduced to a small but comfortable glow. Carver and old Ivan sprang eagerly from their seats; and Ivan, stuttering with exultation, ran forward to greet his friends by the fire. Andrews and Prince Sergius climbed down stiffly, being cramped and half numb from the long strain and the cold. Andrews took out his watch. It was half past three; and the night was just beginning to change with that mysterious grey pallor which comes in just before dawn. They had run the air for one hundred and fifty miles.

"Kick up *one* of those fires a little bit, boys!" said Prince Sergius, swinging his arms. "We're frozen."

CHAPTER III

OVER BOSNIA

HERE they drank hot coffee, while their tanks drank petrol. Thirty minutes sufficed—but to their impatience it was hours. The lowered moon was beginning to whiten and grow papery as they climbed back to their seats. They shook hands formally with each of the little band of watchers.

"How did you come to be so sharp on the look out?" asked Prince Sergius of their leader. "You couldn't have expected us so soon!"

"The captain said you might come any minute!" answered the mountaineer a little stiffly. "Did you think to catch us sleeping at our post?"

"Does one think to catch the eagle asleep?" demanded Prince Sergius in reply. It was not a question that called for an answer; but it soothed the mountaineer's resentment.

"Better keep wide of Vishegrad, Prince," he admonished. "Better keep to this side, along the hills. There's a troop of Austrian Light Horse in the town, and they might give you some trouble."

"Good!" said Sergius. "Hear that, Bob?"

"Right!" answered the Englishman. "Austrian Horse at Vishegrad. Keep clear —to left along the mountain. I caught it. Let me get off ahead, now!"

Motor and propeller broke out with their high chanting. As if in response, along the chain of mountain-tops some twenty miles to eastward—the boundary-line between Bosnia and Servia—a thin flush sprang into the sky, and spread swiftly. A vast, slow air, with an awakening sting in its chill, drew across the shadowy earth.

"Let her go!" sang out Andrews, in Servian.

The great white biplane rushed and soared. The watchers shouted involuntarily, and then stood silent, spell-bound. Half a minute later the pale dragon-fly followed, springing aloft more steeply, and swiftly overhauling its fellow.

"It is a miracle," muttered the leader to his awe-struck companions as the two machines, three hundred feet in air, swept from view around the shoulder of the mountain.

Day broke swiftly. As the flyers climbed the air, to get above the swirls and turmoil which the first light would cause at earth's surface, the black Servian summits were suddenly outlined in rose fire. Vishegrad came into view, some five miles ahead, and to the right, nestled in a bend of the Drina. Over its roofs something glittered, several shining points gave back the light from church spire and minaret. Sergius, now leading, but

careful not to get far ahead of the biplane, pressed further to the left, till he was over the broken ground and oak-woods which divided the cultivated foot-hills from the heights. In a few minutes they were abreast of Vishegrad, still at a distance of perhaps five miles. A few thin columns of smoke stood straight up against the dawn. Smoke, in lilac and saffron spirals, arose from farmstead and hamlet dotted over the plain. As the light cleared, and the sky began to take on the blue of day, then their true colours came back to the young wheat and the flax fields, and the rich brown acres where the fresh tobacco plants were not yet forward enough to hide the soil.

"I don't wonder you Serbs won't stand it, to have such a land snatched from you," said Carver in the Prince's ear.

"We won't! We won't!" shouted Sergius, in the teeth of the wind.

Some ten miles further on they bade farewell, at last, to the river which had thus far guided them. Far upon their right they saw its sky-reflecting reaches, as it turned eastward across the plain toward a cleft in the Servian mountains. Their own course now lay straight north-west along the skirts of the plain. In another hour they caught sight of two signal smokes rising from a field to their right, and swerved wide to pass over them. There they saw the two white sheets pegged to the ground, the group of watchers about the new-lit fires; and they realized how

efficiently Gregory had done his work. But they had petrol yet for a good hour and a half. They were sweeping onward triumphantly above the two thin smokes, when Plamenac seemed to feel a tug at his inner consciousness. It was as if he were leaving something down there by the smokes, something which he might need very badly.

"Signal Andrews," he shouted, beginning to circle to the right, away from the other aeroplane. "We'll stop here and fill up."

"But we're loaded for another seventy miles yet!" protested Carver, as he waved the little red flag.

The pale dragon-fly was already swooping back, and settling over the smokes.

"Coast's clear here, and we'll make the most of it," replied Sergius. "Next depot is where this chain of hills comes to an end, not far from Zhupche. We'd *have to* stop them. And if the coast wasn't clear we'd find ourselves in a hole!"

"Right O!" agreed the American, heartily.

The big biplane obeyed the signal rather slowly, as if reluctant to halt in so prosperous a progress. Before it landed at the fires, Prince Sergius and Carver had shaken hands with the wondering watchers, and were already filling their tank.

"Do you chaps *drink* petrol?" demanded Andrews, from his seat, while old Ivan ran forward to embrace his friends. "I've enough still in my tank to take me all the way to Mother Maria's hog-pens, if this

weather keeps up. That's where my Farman beats you silly, even if she *is* a bit slower."

"You never can have too much petrol!" retorted Sergius. "And as for the advantage of your two-decker, well, we'll see. I'm certainly satisfied with my white eagle, here."

The sun was well above the mountains by the time they were again under way. It presently raised a light wind, but, fortunately, a following wind. Blowing over the foot-hills and abrupt ravines, it created occasional eddies and whirling up-rushes, so Prince Sergius led the flight further out above the plain. Here the eddies gave no more trouble, and they found that the breeze was adding eight or ten miles an hour to their speed. They were running now at a height of about two thousand feet. The chequered fields slid by beneath them; and the landscape, looking like a vast shallow bowl, seemed to roll away on either side of them in tremendous parabolic curves.

All at once Prince Sergius heard a change in the roaring hum which filled his ears. It had suddenly diminished in volume. Anxiously he glanced at his own motor and propellers. They were attending strictly to business. Then he heard Carver's voice at his ear.

"*By* George! Something wrong with their motor. It's stopped!"

With a qualm of dread Sergius looked across the hundred yards or so which separated him from the other machine. The

great biplane's propeller was still. But it was clear, to his great relief, that Andrews had the situation in hand. He had turned half round to the left, and was gliding downward, swift, but steady as a table, toward an expanse of what looked like pasture land. Sergius could make out some shepherds, with several large flocks of sheep. Where sheep feed, that is apt to mean close turf and firm ground. He headed his dragon-fly downward toward the same landing-place.

"Let's pray it's nothing serious!" he cried.

"It'll have to be something pretty bad that *we* can't mend!" answered the American, confidently, following the descent with his glass. "That looks like good ground."

"And old Ivan's sure to find friends, or fellow-outlaws, among those shepherds," added Sergius.

The flocks fled in uncontrollable panic as the white monster swooped down upon them out of the blue. Some of the shepherds followed their charges; while the others, awe-struck, but scorning to run, stood staring upward with blanched faces. Through his glass, Carver saw old Ivan looking at the silent motor. He saw Andrews put the wheel into the old mountaineer's hand, with a gesture which seemed to say: "Hold it steady!" Then Andrews turned in his seat, reached backward, and with his right hand did something swiftly. The biplane was within fifty feet of the earth, and staggering

dangerously under Ivan's untaught guidance. In a flash Andrews had turned, and clutched the wheel again. The propeller was seen to spin, to whirl once more into invisibility.

"Oh, neat! Neat! By George!" shouted the American; and in the same second the heavy hum of the Gnome motor rose again to Plamenac's ears. The biplane's descent stopped. It ran along on level planes, some twenty feet above the shepherds, to whom Ivan, leaning down, was seen to shout something. Then it turned upwards and swiftly remounted the morning air.

"Thank God!" cried Prince Sergius, fervently, and once more turned the nose of his dragon-fly toward the sky.

"About the coolest and neatest thing *I've* ever had the luck to see!" remarked the American.

"When anything *can* be done, you can count on Bob to do it!" said Sergius. "Keep a sharp watch ahead, and if we catch sight of a patrol we'll run up higher. By the look of the country we're all right down here for a while."

For the next hour the landscape never changed, except for the gradual shortening of the shadows as the sun rolled up the blue. Wheat-field, flax-field, tobacco-field, meadow, sprawling hamlet, and solitary farmstead, they succeded each other endlessly; and always along their left ran the towering rampart of the mountains. At last, the mountains fell away suddenly, as if the plain had en-

gulfed them, and in the distance a spire and a minaret rose to view over the roofs of Zhupche. Immediately, Sergius turned his course sharply to the left, toward the last of the foot-hills, looking for the next petrol depot.

It was a rolling country here—a country of low, bare ridges, irregular valleys, and patches of dense oak-forest. Carver swept every inch of the land to locate the two white sheets. Suddenly, dead ahead arose the two smokes, from behind a screen of billowy oak grove.

"Your admirable outlaw never fails us, Plamenac!" exclaimed the American, levelling his glasses at the signal.

But the words were hardly out of his mouth when he detected a third smoke, shaping thinly behind the leafage. The next instant it curled up dense and emphatic, as if damp straw had been thrown upon the fire.

"Aha! That means 'Go on'!" cried Sergius, slanting his planes sharply upward, and at the same time swerving off to the right.

"Keep near enough to see what's the matter!" urged the American.

"We can't afford curiosity!" answered the Prince, mounting as steeply as he dared. The great biplane came soaring up after him.

Then, from behind the trees three rifle shots spoke faintly.

They were now about fifteen hundred feet in the air, and the smokes were some two hundred yards to the left. They swept

beyond the screening groves, and saw men running to cover behind the oak-trunks.

"There's one of our men down!" said the American in an icy voice. "There he is by the last fire. Swing a bit nearer, Plamenac. I can't stand that! There they are, damn them! The uniforms! Among the trees the other side of the field."

He snatched up the rifle that lay beside him. Involuntarily Prince Sergius swung inward toward the fight, though wisdom urged him to fly. As Carver levelled his weapon, two pale tongues of flame leaped out from behind the trees where the Austrians were hiding. An arm and shoulder came into view beside a great oak-trunk. The American's rifle spoke, and again. The arm and shoulder had disappeared. A faint report came from the other aeroplane.

"Old Ivan's at it again! Well, I winged my man!" said Carver, coolly, laying down the rifle.

"Yes?" answered Sergius, swinging off again at a sharp angle, and climbing steeply. "Well, we can't afford any more of this. Signal Andrews. He's run in too close. He's as bad as you and Ivan. We can't risk our venture in a petty skirmish."

"That's all right!" said Carver. "But I had to even up a bit for that poor fellow down there by the fire. And it wouldn't have looked well to leave our fellows there without a word for luck. There comes Andrews. I'll bet he and Ivan don't like quitting not one little bit.

Sergius grinned as he bent over the wheel, urging his dragon-fly upward from the danger level.

"For a respectable citizen of Buffalo, U.S.A., old man, you'd make a very fair Servian bandit," he remarked. "But don't think *I* enjoy running away, any better than you do."

"Darn good thing you made us stop back yonder for petrol," said Carver. "If we hadn't, we'd have been in the soup now, for fair!'

"Yes. It was guidance!" responded the Prince, gravely.

The machines were now two thousand feet up and flying level. The last of the hill had dropped behind. Zhupche was dwindling in the haze, far to the left. A delicious warmth came up from the breadths of tilled field and meadow. The sky was deep blue, and clear as washed glass. As he flew, peering far ahead toward his next landmark—a loop of the river Bonsa, where he would cross that storied stream—Sergius pondered with sharp anxiety over the attack on the post. What did it mean? How much did the Austrians know, or even suspect? And how could their suspicions, however grave, have got hold of any accuracy of direction? What did Madame de L'Orme know? And how did she come to know it? And why did she show such concern as to a peril threatening himself! Or was it because the peril threatened Andrews? This latter notion, to his amazement, gave

him a stabbing pang at the heart. He was so surprised that he laughed shortly, there, over the wheel, with the wind of their flight in his teeth. But he felt somehow that it *was* on account of himself, rather than of Andrews, that she was so concerned. Yet, how had she got herself mixed up in it, and how had that unspeakable husband of hers found out anything—if he had? Absorbed in these enigmas, the leagues fled by below without his noting them. The Bosna was reached, and thereafter he followed its general course, but cutting chords and tangents to its innumerable curves. At last the river swerved off decisively toward the north-east, while the path of the Great Adventure lay straight north-west. To the left—at a safe distance—lay the little town of Durventa, on a small river of which he had forgotten the name. Not more than twenty miles ahead was the Save. He would breathe freer when he had crossed that tide, for he would be in Slavonia, a tranquil province, where there would be fewer Austrian patrols to trouble his wits about.

His nerves were so strung up by the long, unremitting tension of the flight, he was so engrossed in his thoughts, and at the same time so semi-hypnotized by the prolonged hum of motor and propeller, that he started at the sudden yell of Carver's voice at his ear.

"Ain't the petrol running pretty low?" it inquired.

With a sinking of apprehension he looked at the gauge.

"We can keep up for twenty minutes more —at the outside!" he answered. "Less, if anything. The glasses, old man. Where are we?"

"I make out water ahead, biggish water—a lake maybe!" answered the American. "No, it's a river."

"Thank God! It's the Save, and nearer, much nearer than I thought!"

"Ah, yes! And now I make out a little river running into it, just beyond a patch of woods," continued Carver.

"That's the place!" shouted Sergius. "That's the next depot. How far would you say?"

"Twelve—perhaps! No—more! Fourteen, maybe!" hesitated Carver. "Hard to judge from this height. I don't believe it's more than fifteen!"

"We'll make it," declared Sergius, putting on top speed and slipping ahead of the other machine.

"By the skin of our teeth!" said the American, crisply.

CHAPTER IV

PATROL AND PETROL

RAPIDLY they left the biplane behind as they raced against petrol for the river-junction. Rapidly the smooth reaches of the Save rose into clear view, shining in the sun. The miles fled, crowding upon the heels of the desperate minutes. At length a long narrow field appeared on the hither side of the woods, and about half a mile south of the Save shore.

"Reckon I see the place," shouted Carver, triumphantly. "If that's it, we'll make it safe. Aye! Aye! There's the two sheets. Now for the two smokes! I see somebody moving, but I can't make him out very clearly against the trees. Ah, here come the smokes. They've caught sight of us!" And he laid down the glass in his lap to wipe his wind-fretted eyes.

"Yes!" said Prince Sergius, a moment later. "There are the smokes. But, Carver, *there are three of them!*"

"By——" and Carver forgot to finish his oath in his haste to get the glass back to his eyes.

"The chap I saw lighting the fires is gone," he went on. "Ah, ha! There's why. There come the Austrians, six of them,

from the other side of the field! What's to be done, Plamenac?"

"There's only one thing to be done," replied the Prince, coolly, dipping his planes for the long slide down the air. "Our petrol's there. We've *got to* go and get it!"

The American laughed approvingly. "I love your nerve, my son! How do you propose that we shall work it? Fight, or bluff?"

"Whichever may seem most appropriate to the occasion!" replied Sergius, lifting the dragon-fly with a long swoop as he saw that she had been dropping too fast. "How far back are the others?"

"Two miles, maybe!"

"They'll be along in good time!" said Sergius. "Have your guns ready. But *don't* shoot unless it comes to the last pinch. I'll give sweet reasonableness a trial."

"You're captain!" said the American. "But I couldn't stand any nonsense from them, you know!"

"Nor I! Don't worry!" answered Sergius.

As the monoplane came within easy range, dropping fast, and making straight for the place where they were standing, the little group of Austrians seemed astonished. They had taken up a position close to the three fires, which were near the centre of the field. At a height of about nine hundred feet, Prince Sergius stopped his motor, and planed down at terrific speed, calculating on the impression he would make. At some thirty feet

from the ground he lifted her plunging nose, swooped along just above the sod, and came gently to rest in front of the awe-struck enemy.

The leader of the band, however, regained his self-possession on the instant. He was a ruddy-faced Teuton, tall and massive, with irascible blue eyes and a bristling blonde moustache. He came forward with an authoritative air, and addressed his aerial visitors brusquely.

"Your business?"

Prince Sergius, resting quietly in his seat between the wings of the dragon-fly, met the eyes of his interrogator with a look of cold rebuke. After a slight pause, to convey his displeasure, he replied with courtesy.

"Our business is our pleasure!" said he. "We are on our way north, on a flight from Montenegro, by far the most ambitious flight yet attempted by aeroplanes, and we have stopped here for a fresh supply of petrol, which was ordered to be left here for us that our journey might not be delayed."

The German laughed rudely.

"You'll find there's no hurry," said he.

"No? May I ask why?"

"Because you are under arrest. There are things the Government wants to know about you, so you'll come with me to Durventa and explain yourself. Come now, climb down out of that machine of yours, and come along. I haven't any time to waste."

The conversation had been carried on in

German, and Carver knew just enough German to catch the drift of it.

"Curse his swinish impudence!" said he. Prince Sergius looked back at the sky to see how near the biplane was. It was not yet as near as he could have wished, but it was already slanting downwards.

"Pardon me, captain! I don't think you quite understand the situation," said he, civil, but firm, and with a trace of condescension in his voice. He knew that the fellow before him was not a captain at all, nor a subaltern of any grade, but only a sergeant. Nevertheless, it was more significant to condescend to a captain than to a sergeant, and at the same time the angry-eyed sergeant was flattered in spite of himself. In order to give both the flattery and the condescension time to sink in, Prince Sergius allowed him no opportunity to repeat his rudeness, but continued coldly:

"We are well-known gentlemen, pursuing our diversion without harm or inconvenience to anyone whatever. We will show you our passports, of course, if you wish to see them. I am Prince Sergius de Plamenac. My friend here is Mr Wesley Carver, a prominent citizen of the United States. And another friend, who is coming as quickly as possible in that aeroplane yonder, is Captain Andrews, of the British Army. I think you will see that this is one of those cases in which it would be well not to exceed your duty, captain!"

Thinking himself mistaken for an officer,

the Austrian became better mannered, though not in the least degree diverted from his purpose. He drew himself up and grew ceremonious. Ceremony takes time, and time was what Prince Sergius was playing for.

"As I have already had the honour to inform you, Prince," said he, pompously, "you are under arrest. I don't require your passports. They're nothing to me. You are, all of you, my prisoners, and will come with me to Durventa. You can display your passports there, Prince, no doubt, if you like. That's not my affair."

"But, captain," said the Prince, softly, "we cannot possibly go to Durventa with you!" The hum of Andrews' approach was now thrilling in their ears. The Austrian did not quite catch the smiling words.

"What's that?" he demanded, forgetting his ceremony.

"I said, that we are obliged to deny ourselves the pleasure you propose for us! or words to that effect!" repeated Prince Sergius, eyeing him with an ironical smile.

"Thousand thunders!" roared the Austrian. "You'll see!" And he turned to call his guard.

"Stop! Or you're a dead man!" ordered Prince Sergius. The words were not loud, but the tone was penetrating, and the assured authority of it made the sergeant, who was trained to obey such tones, hesitate in spite of himself. Not fear of the threat, but the force of habit stopped him.

"Rubbish! What do you mean?" he demanded, with a mixture of scorn and boorish curiosity.

"Exactly what I say!" replied the Prince, incisively. "You see that my American friend here has his right hand (take a good look) on one of his country's excellent repeating rifles. He does not miss. He could shoot the buttons off your coat at forty paces. You'd be snuffed out before you could say two words; and my friend would still have plenty of cartridges left in his magazine for your five men yonder. (*Don't* turn, I have you covered, captain, from my pocket, here!) Furthermore, you will observe my two friends in the other aeroplane, who have at last arrived to join in our festivities. They are circling around us, you see, without coming to earth. One of those two is Ivan Petrovich, the best marksman in Montenegro. As you doubtless realize, he is very eager to exercise his skill on an Austrian uniform, if only I would permit him. You will see that just for the moment, captain, we hold all the trumps. You'll have better luck next time, perhaps."

The Austrian was no coward, or he would not have been doing patrol duty in Bosnia. He glanced into the steady, grey, shining eyes of the American. Then he looked at the great white biplane, which was circling the field like a marsh-hawk at a distance of some fifty feet from the ground. He noted the pleased self-possession on the face of the

Englishman as he guided the amazing machine through the air; and he also noted the dark, eagle face and glittering eyes of old Ivan, as he sat expectant in his rushing seat with his rifle across his knees. All this the Austrian noted with precision, and his little blue eyes blazed with wrath. It was not fear, not the least shadow of fear which kept him from rushing upon Prince Sergius like a mad bull and putting all to the test of one headlong onslaught. But he was methodical in his mental processes for all his violence of temper. He felt quite sure of himself. He was certain that promotion would come to him from this affair, and he had a practical desire to live to profit by it. Therefore, he temporized.

"Rubbish!" he growled. "Utter rubbish! You're my prisoners. And you'll come quietly to Durventa with me. Your other machine will have to come to earth in a few minutes. It will want petrol, too! I'd like to know how you think you're going to fill up your tanks!"

"I haven't considered that yet, captain, unless you should be so kind as to tell your men to do it for us!" answered Prince Sergius, hopefully.

The man choked with indignation. Then he bellowed a laugh, thrust his hand into the breast of his tunic and drew out a cigar. Prince Sergius followed his example, but with his left hand, keeping his right on the butt of the heavy pistol in his side pocket.

"I've some rather nice Havanas here, captain," said he, "if you'll do me the honour."

"Thank you," retorted the man, looking up with a grin, "I'll take them *all* presently. You've smuggled them in!" And he went on lighting his black Slavonian weed. His five fellows beside the fire, some thirty paces distant, stood watching stolidly. Prince Sergius let his glance roam past them to the fringe of woods.

"By the way, captain!" said he.

The man took a couple of deep puffs, threw away the match, and looked up inquiringly.

"I think—I may say I am quite sure—*you* are *my* prisoner," continued the Prince. "Look!"

About twenty men, some in brown peasant garb, some in the picturesque costume of the mountain bands, but all armed to the teeth, were emerging from the woods in various quarters, and converging on the centre of the field.

The Austrian's face fell. Between these free bands and the Austrians the feud was to the death, and no courtesies. His resolution was prompt.

"I surrender to *you,* Prince, I and my men. To *you,* you understand."

"Certainly. Call your men over here," said Sergius.

They came with alacrity. They laid their weapons on the ground, and stood close beside the aeroplane. Seeing the turn of affairs,

Andrews brought his biplane to earth as close as possible to the Antoinette. The leader of the free band came forward ahead of his men, a tall, far-striding figure; and Prince Sergius descended to meet him.

"I'm glad we got here in time to be of service, Prince!" said the mountaineer, grasping Plamenac's hand. "Captain Gregory did not lead us to look for you quite so soon."

"Thank you, Captain Stephan. You've rendered a more invaluable service than you realize," answered Sergius. "We should probably have had to blow up these Austrians to make them listen to reason. And it is of the very essence of our undertaking that there should be no fighting or bloodshed, nothing to make us conspicuous for the present. I was in a dreadful dilemma."

The mountaineer looked at the group by the aeroplane as if he was aware of their presence for the first time.

"We'll hang them quietly, by and by!" said he with elaborate indifference.

"Unfortunately," replied Prince Sergius, "that is just what cannot be done. They had us in their power for a few minutes, and could have wrecked our whole venture. But I parleyed with them. They are my prisoners, and I have pledged my honour that they shall not suffer. Besides, you would make a noise in Europe, my captain. And that would be fatal just now."

The mountaineer frowned. It was annoying to be forbidden to hang his enemies.

"My men will be enraged. They have long scores to settle," he protested.

"You will make them wait," responded Prince Sergius. "You can tell them from me, that it will not be long before we square accounts with Austria. But meanwhile, as touching these poor slaves, who have but tried to do their masters' bidding"—(in the eyes of the mountaineers, this was bitterest of contumely)—"you understand well that my private honour is in your hands, captain. I look to you to guard it when I leave!"

"What must be, must be!" sighed the mountaineer, with deep reluctance.

"You will hold them, captain, for twenty-four hours, and then send them back uninjured, unmisused in any way, to Durventa!" insisted Sergius.

"You have my word! They shall be counted as your children till the next time we meet them!"

"Thank you!" said the Prince, and held out his hand. The mountaineer grasped it.

"You will be safe with this gentleman." Prince Sergius turned to the Austrian leader.

"Yes, I know!" grunted the man savagely. He turned his furious little blue eyes for one moment full upon the mountaineer's face, and his heavy mouth worked as if he were about to burst forth with curses. Then he spat scornfully on the ground, and fell to studying the tree-tops.

"And now, Captain Stephan, let me

present my dear friends—*our* true friends and allies—Captain Andrews and Mr Wesley Carver. My friend, Ivan Petrovich, you know."

"And I know all about Mr Carver and Captain Andrews. In the name of our Holy Servia, I thank and bless them!" cried the mountaineer, his fierce face breaking into smiles of ardent welcome. "What time did you leave the Black Mountain? And why so much sooner than Gregory expected?"

"We left at a few hours' notice, because of a warning that reached us from Belgrade. We started just after midnight. We're ravenous, Captain Stephan. I could eat an ox if you happen to have one about you."

It was Andrews who answered, laughing with boyish satisfaction, and stretching his long legs fantastically to take the cramp and numbness out of them. Prince Sergius and Carver, meanwhile, had gone off with two of the Bosnians to the edge of the woods to get the hidden petrol.

"You've not breakfasted, then?" exclaimed Stephan.

"No, indeed, captain!" responded Andrews, enthusiastically. "But we're most open to an invitation if you're so good as to think of inviting us. Besides, here under your care's the only place, this side of a thousand feet up, where we could feel safe."

The mountaineer laughed sympathetically. The big Englishman seemed to make nothing of running a hundred leagues of air and drop-

ping down out of the sky for either a battle or a breakfast. This attitude was much to Captain Stephan's taste. He gave quick orders to certain of his men, and two of them set off for the woods at a run, while others busied themselves about the fires. Sergius and Carver were just coming up with the petrol.

"Gentlemen, you are to have breakfast with me before you go any further," said he. "Captain Andrews has accepted for you."

"With all my heart!" exclaimed Sergius; while the American hurried over to examine the biplane's motor. He had been consumed with curiosity as to what Andrews had done to it so quickly while in the air.

CHAPTER V

AT MOTHER MARIA'S HOG-PENS

By the air line, they were now not more than an hour and a quarter's flight from their goal. After a stout breakfast of ham and black bread, with unstinted coffee, this seemed nothing. They felt themselves already there. But it was now the time of day when all the world was trafficking, and the country-side full of eyes. After a brief consultation with Andrews and Carver, Prince Sergius decided that they should add a half hour to their journey by flying at first due north, so as to set possible spies on a false trail.

As they climbed once more into their seats, the mountaineer leader said warmly :

" You had better fly as high as you can, Prince, while crossing the river."

" Yes," answered Sergius, " we'll keep up, as well out of range as possible, till we come to the wooded country to the north of Brod. Then we'll fly low, so that we may not be seen from a distance. There'll probably be no one in the woods up there to want to pot us. Anyhow, we'll risk it."

The sudden roar of motors and propellers drowned his concluding words.

This time Sergius and Andrews got off together. With stupefaction of wonder the mountaineers stood watching as the great machines circled around and around the field in splendid spirals, climbing life falcons into the blue. Not till they had gained the two-thousand-foot level was Sergius satisfied. Then he headed straight away out across the wide current of the Save, with Andrews a few hundred yards behind. In five minutes they were in Slavonia. Ten minutes more and they were over the railway. The long express, coming from Trieste and Agram, and bound for Semlin, passed beneath them. To Carver, gazing down, it seemed to crawl like a wounded worm.

Straight ahead some wooded hills took shape, the outworks of the crescent range which occupies and breaks up the centre of Slavonia. Boldly prodigal of petrol now, Sergius kept climbing the mild air-currents till his height was nearly five thousand feet. From there everything on earth looked little, except his dreams.

Some fifteen minutes more, and they were running above the lonely wooded lanes. Here they dipped the planes. Earth seemed to heave upward to meet them, so swift was their rush down the terrific slopes of air. At a couple of hundred feet above the tree-tops they checked it, and then they skimmed like herons over the green billows of leafage. Here and there narrow glades and scraps of meadow would open suddenly below them;

but such openings were not to be seen until they were close upon them.

"We're taking a big risk, ain't we, Plamenac, flying so low over these woods?" objected the American. "If we had to light suddenly there'd be no chance to pick out one of those little patches. We'd come down in a tree-top, and good-bye to us."

"I think we'd better compromise," said Prince Sergius, and drove the dragon-fly upward again to five hundred feet.

For the next three quarters of an hour all went smoothly, Prince Sergius steering by the compass, and the biplane following. They skirted the line of hills till Plavnitza came into view, dimly shivering in the heat-haze far to their left.

"We arrive! We arrive!" cried Plamenac. "In ten minutes we'll pick up the village. You ought to be able to make it now, Carver, with the glasses."

"I have it," said the American a few minutes later. "Must be it—the only village in sight!"

"Yes, there's no other! Mother Maria's, you remember, is just the other side of the long hill beyond the village. We'll have to swing around out of sight, and come in from behind, over the woods." And Prince Sergius steered sharp to the right. "It would be better, perhaps, to be getting there at night," he went on. "But I'm thinking that every minute counts after all that's happened."

"Right you are!" agreed the American. "I wouldn't lose a second. It's too late for us to play Brer Possum's game!"

At last, as the two great white flyers came droning sonorously over the oak-forests, Carver's glass made out the cabin in the hollow, and then the curious grey rock, like a crouching beast, over which he had so often mused and pondered. There, too, was the one pine-tree, towering over its fair companion oaks.

"That's the spot all right!" he muttered to himself, as a child might speak who saw suddenly an old fairy tale come true. "Yes, everything's according to specifications."

"Do you make out any sign of life about the place? Any sign of Gregory? It will be awkward if we've got here ahead of him!" shouted Plamenac.

"Plenty of pigs!" yelled Carver. And then, after a searching pause: "Yes, yes, *strictly* according to specifications! There's old Gregory, shading his eyes with his hand and staring at us. He looks quite natural. And there are those excellent and admirable cut-throats, his followers, at least a dozen of them, apparently springing up out of the earth to greet us. Plamenac, you've engineered this thing to a marvel. You're great. It's *you* ought to be king of this story-book country, by Jing. If I were a Servian citizen I'd insist upon it."

Prince Sergius laughed.

"No, old boy, you'd never get me into that *galère*. It's a precarious job these days, holding down a throne. But I may find something interesting to do *behind* the throne."

They came to earth between Mother Maria's cabin and the two nearest trees. Gregory fell on their necks in turn. He was incoherent over the miracle of their having come so soon.

"The hand of God is in it, indeed!" he cried to Sergius. "All night I prayed for it, since I heard that the Austrians were warned. But I did not dare to hope. Oh, my faith was weak, and I am ashamed in God's sight. I ought to have known that His hand was in it!"

This outbreak of religious fervour was no surprise to anyone. All knew that for the zealous outlaw, religion and patriotism and raiding and insurrection were effectively intermingled.

"His hand has certainly been with us to-day," replied Prince Sergius, simply.

Hurriedly they ran both aeroplanes down into the hollow under shelter of the cabin; and all of the band, except their chief, resumed their hiding so quickly and quietly that it seemed as if earth had swallowed them.

"I've pickets out all round," said Gregory. "But every minute here is perilous. There's been something found out, somehow. Come!" and seizing a spade that stood against the wall, he called to Mother Maria to bring him another, and led the way toward the nearest

of the two great hog-pens which occupied the centre of the field. The old woman came striding in haste from the cow-shed, a strong, raw-boned figure, with huge kerchief of stout, unbleached linen covering her head, and tied beneath her chin, and wisps of iron-grey hair straggling out from under it. She curtsied with profound reverence to Prince Sergius, and then, less profoundly, to Andrews and Carver. The little party moved quickly toward the pens—Gregory and the old woman leading, while Sergius, Carver and Andrews followed on their heels. As for Ivan, he had disappeared. Hidden under some bush, he was doubtless detailing to thrilled listeners the marvels of his flight.

At this hour the hog-pens stood open. The swine were away feeding along the edge of the oak-forest, herded by Mother Maria's son.

"In this corner!" said Gregory, pointing to a spot in the black mud, rooted by a hundred busy snouts.

"It a great place to hide a treasure, by Jove!" exclaimed Andrews, his blue eyes sparkling like a boy's.

The American gave one keen stare, then turned away satisfied.

"Come on, Andrews!" he said, practically. "We've no time to waste here watching 'em dig. If you'll fill the tanks, I'll be overhauling the motors. This job ain't off our hands yet, by a long chalk! We'd look silly if the Austrians were to happen along and catch us with our tanks unloaded."

"Right you are, old chap!" agreed the Englishman, tearing himself away reluctantly from the sight of the busy spades, and striding back toward the cabin.

Prince Sergius stood watching, calm now as if they had been digging a post-hole. Among the qualities which made him a leader, he had the brain that does not forget little things while occupied with great ones.

"Have you thought, Gregory," he asked, "of the position our good mother and her son will be in after this?"

"Yes, surely," grunted Gregory over the unaccustomed spade. "They'd get their throats cut if they stayed here. They'll have to take to the bush, and follow our men into Servia."

"Have you arranged for any reward for their great and faithful services?" went on Prince Sergius. The old woman seemed to pay no attention, as if the conversation had been in another tongue.

"Certainly *not!*" replied Gregory. "Such services are not bought."

"Naturally! For money could not pay for them. Only the gratitude of our country can reward them," said Prince Sergius, tactfully. Then he addressed the old woman. "Mother," said he, in the homely speech of the people, "the highest privilege of the Fatherland is to reward its faithful children. You and your son are giving up everything for the Fatherland. The Fatherland must care for you. Captain Gregory will see that you

have what you and your son may need for the present. And I want you to come straight to M'latza, where my people will be honoured in entertaining you till you have made up your mind where you will have your new home."

Mother Maria had paused in her digging to listen reverentially, her gnarled hands, the colour of old wood, resting on the top of her spade. She was struggling to find a reply when Gregory cut her short by urging her on with the work.

"Dig! Dig! Mother. You can thank Prince Sergius at M'latza," said he. "But if you don't hurry now, he'll never get there!"

Sergius laughed, and turned away.

"*I* mustn't loaf here!" said he. "I'll go and have everything ready for an instant start. You'll come back with us, Gregory, of course, instead of Ivan."

"Surely, my Prince!" said Gregory, thrusting his spade to one side, and reaching down into the hole.

Most of Gregory's band had been at the Niksich camp at some time during the past month, and so were more or less familiar with the marvel of an aeroplane. But five were outlaws from North Bosnia, and knew only what their comrades had tried to tell them. These five now crept down into the hollow beside the cabin, where Sergius, Andrews, and Carver were busy over the great white planes. They seemed to regard the machines as something of divine origin, as a sort of direct

bequest from heaven to Prince Sergius for the benefit of Holy Servia, and they took off their caps reverently as they approached. Smilingly, Prince Sergius pointed out to them, as he worked, the source of power in the machines, and explained how fast and how far they could fly without fresh fuel—all of which, however, detracted in no way from the religious reverence of the attitude of these pious bandits. As the Prince was talking, Gregory came briskly down the slope, followed by Mother Maria with the spades. He carried two leathern bags, corded securely with thongs of leather, and heavily sealed.

"It's all here!" said he, in a solemn voice, and handed the bags to Sergius with the gesture of a priest serving the sacrament.

Sergius took them, and held them for a moment in silence. Every one stood silent and motionless. It was so still, for several seconds, that the sudden scratching of one of Mother Maria's red pullets in the straw before the cow-shed became a noticeable sound. It stirred a new train of thought in the old woman's brain, and her lips worked, and she wailed: "Oh, I'm leaving it all! I'm leaving it all! And I'll never find chickens anywhere else to lay like my red ones!"

She dashed the back of her hand across her brave old eyes and hurried into the cabin to collect some of her treasures. Immediately, in a matter-of-fact voice, Prince Sergius said:

"We could carry them more conveniently and securely if they were in several smaller

parcels! But I suppose there's no use taking the time now." He handed one of the bags to Andrews, who proceeded to lash it to his belt. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he turned and gave the other bag to the astonished American.

"Take care of it for me, Carver. I don't know anyone better able to," said he.

The words were hardly spoken when a rifle-shot, followed instantly by another, resounded from the further slope of the hill.

"That's the signal! Quick! We must be off!" shouted Gregory. "Ivan! Ivan!"

The old mountaineer started forward from the bushes in the same moment that both motors began roaring. Gregory threw him his purse.

"I'm going in your place. Take the men back and meet me at Niksich," he directed. "And I commit Maria and her boy to your care, Ivan. Give them what they need, and send them to Prince Sergius at M'latza."

While he was giving these orders, the planes, now throbbing and humming with fierce life, were being rushed up out of the hollow to the hard, level ground behind the pine-tree. The men who had been at the Niksich camp held them in leash, while Prince Sergius, Carver, and Andrews climbed hastily to their seats.

"Come on! Come on! Captain!" yelled Andrews above the noise of the machines. Gregory came leaping up with immense bounds like one of his own mountain goats,

and wriggled himself lithely into his place beside the Englishman.

"Let go!" commanded the Prince, while Andrews waited to let the Antoinette get off ahead to avoid any possibility of the machines fouling each other's wings at the start.

"They get away quicker than we do," he explained to Gregory, "so they *might* bump *us;* but we aren't quick enough to bump them, no matter how clumsy I might be."

Within a hundred feet of the pine-tree, the slender monoplane was well in the air, and slanting upwards at a daring angle. Then the big biplane started after it with a fierce rush, going at tremendous speed over the hard, perfectly smooth turf, and leaping strongly into the air like a heron. The men stood staring after them for a few seconds only, then ran, carrying their rifles at the trail, around to the other side of the cabin, to throw themselves down and peer cautiously over the crest of the rise.

CHAPTER VI

THROUGH THE HEART OF THE STORM

As the dragon-fly came over the edge of the forest she had a height of some five hundred feet; while the biplane was a hundred feet lower, and considerably to the rear.

"By Jing!" came Carver's voice in Plamenac's ear. "Good thing Andrews and I got to filling the tanks when we did, instead of loafing around to watch old Mother Hubbard and Gregory digging diamonds out of a hog-wallow—though that, I'll allow, was not what you might call an ordinary spectacle."

"Indeed, your forethought has saved the day," responded Sergius. "I wish I could look round. What's going on back there, now?"

Carver had the glass at his eyes.

"The pickets are running up the hill; and old Mother Hubbard's boy is quitting his hogs and running back to the house to see what's up. Mother Hubbard herself's just coming out of the cabin with a little basket and a big bundle done up in a red quilt. I wonder if she thinks she can run away from the Austrians with all that stuff in her arms. Oh no! Son will carry it, *maybe!* I don't

know the manners and customs of sons in these parts. Ah! Ha! There come the Austrians half a mile down the hill yet, but Great Jonas! there's a slue of them. They must think we meant war. Ivan appears to be giving our fellows a Sunday school lesson, by the way they're all hanging round him while he waves his hands over 'em. By Jing, boys, it's time you were making yourselves scarce. There, they're off—none too soon—scattering across the field by twos and threes after old Mother Hubbard. Ivan's last. He don't appear to like running away any too well. No help for it, partner! They're too many for you. Hurry along, now! By Jing, what's struck the pigs? Apparently they've just caught on to the fact that there's a disturbance. They're tearing like mad down the field, and I can just imagine how they're squealing. Good! the last of our chaps has disappeared into the woods. I'm glad there's not going to be a fight, since we can't be in it. There come the Austrians now, over the hill—just too late for the affair. Some of them are running into the cabin and the shed, to see if we've left any letters for them, probably. The rest are staring after us, as if they found aeroplanes uncommonly interesting. Now they're going to try a shot at us. Don't you know we're out of range, my friends? There, they've fired a volley! We'd have heard that if it hadn't been for the noise we're making ourselves! No harm to waste a little ammuni-

tion! Well, good-bye, gentlemen! Or shall we say *au revoir?*"

He laid down the glass beside him.

"We're all very well out of *that,* Plamenac!" he said, after a pause. "But tell me what we're up against now. No more petrol stations ahead of us. And we've only got three hours' flight in us!"

"That's a good hundred and fifteen miles," answered Prince Sergius, "even holding back as we do to keep from running away from Andrews and Gregory. But I calculate that something less than ninety miles' flying will take us over the border into Servia. This day, this weather, they seem to have been made for us."

"I don't know much about your Balkan weather," said Carver, "but if I were in Buffalo I'd say this was most too good to last. This heat, and this calm, and this time o' year, taken all together would be a weather-breeder. I'd be on the look-out for a thunder-squall."

"We'll pray it may keep off for three hours, anyhow!" replied the Prince.

Now, at a height of about five hundred feet —not high enough to be seen from any great distance, yet sufficiently high to secure some choice of landing-place in case of a forced descent—Prince Sergius slackened the dragon-fly's darting speed, and gave the Farman a chance to gradually creep nearer. In the course of an hour the two machines were flying abreast, and about two hundred yards

apart. The mountains, even the lesser hills, had been left behind, and they were soaring over fertile plains, dotted with villages, and interspersed with wide areas of woodland. Down on the earth men and beasts at this hour were sweating under a sultry and ominous heat. But up here in the sky the voyagers were cooled by the wind of their winged rushing.

By and by the face of the chequered land below them gradually changed. The farms and tilled areas grew fewer, and the dark green of tree-tops seemed to encroach upon them greedily. As landing-places became more scattered and uncertain, the aeroplanes soared to a higher level, that they might command a wider choice.

"This is not just the country I'd pick out to fly over," said Prince Sergius, "if we were having more wind than we knew what to do with."

Carver, with the glasses, was scanning the land anxiously to either side of their flight.

"Well, there's our wind coming—a bit of a breeze, anyhow, blowing up from sou'-east," he exclaimed. "I see the colour changing on the tree-tops as it comes. Do you catch it? A couple of points off to your right there!"

"Yes," answered the Prince, presently, and headed the great dragon-fly to meet it fair in the teeth. "It doesn't look like any sort of a stiff blow; but it's going to make us lose

time. There, Andrews has noticed it. He's heading up to it."

"I don't altogether like the looks of that cloud-bank piling up over there," said Carver. "The breeze is coming straight out of it. I should say there's more behind it."

Just then the blue-back pile on the horizon was streaked by a double fork of white flame.

"It's a thunder-squall!" said Sergius, though no sound of thunder came to their ears. The distant rumble was not heavy enough to surmount the throbbing chant of the 'planes. "It will blow itself out, probably, before it gets to us. But all the same, to be on the safe side, we'll work up as quick as we can toward those open fields yonder. Pasture, aren't they?"

"Yes! We'd better get near them!" answered Carver. "Ah, Andrews has got it! Now, mind your eye, Plamenac!"

The biplane was several hundred yards to the south-east of the Antoinette, and so caught the breeze first. They saw it lurch abruptly, lift like a blown leaf some fifty feet upon the gust, and then apparently bear down upon them at appalling speed. In reality, it had merely lost its headway all at once, thus letting the dragon-fly rush up. In the next instant, however, the wind reached the monoplane, and checked her way also. For a second she staggered, then bounded aloft, steadying herself with a convulsive undulation of her wings as Sergius warped the tips sharply against her roll. A moment later

both aeroplanes, the biplane some seconds before the Antoinette, dropped straight downward on even keel some fifty or sixty feet, as if a supporting hand had been all at once withdrawn from under them. The next instant they darted forward again at top speed. They were in the lull behind the first gust.

"That was pleasantly exciting!" said Prince Sergius.

"Yes, brisk!" agreed Carver. "But if I'm any judge of weather, that was only intended for an appetizer. My advice is to get down as soon as we can make a landing, and lie low under the lee of the woods till the squall's over."

"Your advice is undoubtedly sound, old boy," responded the Prince, "and I only wish I could act upon it at once. However, we're getting ahead pretty well now. That pasture field is drawing nearer rapidly."

A moment more and the wind returned—but this time gently. Gently it began; but it kept steadily increasing in force, till the 'planes, their singing screws boring straight into it, were not advancing more than five or six miles an hour. The gesticulating tree-tops beneath seemed to crawl by in mocking deliberation.

Cautiously the battling machines nosed their way downward to the two-hundred-foot level, to be ready to swoop to covert as soon as they should gain that patch of pasture, whose light-green gleamed so invitingly a mile or so ahead of them.

"We can handle this wind easily enough," said Sergius, "but I want to get out of it. We're wasting our precious petrol. We're just guzzling it."

Carver was watching the other machine critically.

"That Farman's behaving well!" he commented. "She's rolling a bit, but doesn't pitch; and she keeps her speed like a wonder. Why, she's holding us level. Have you full power on, Plamenac?"

"I should say I had!" responded the Prince, emphatically.

"Well, then, I should say that as long as we're butting into a head wind, we're not going to have to hold back any for Brother Andrews. But I'll be anxious for him if the wind gets corkscrewy."

By this time they were come within three or four hundred yards of the field. Suddenly, the forest beyond the field, and then the field itself, were drowned in shadow. Then the blackness swept over the sun. The change was instantaneous and daunting. A few big drops plumped down sharply on the 'planes.

"We're in for it now!" said the American, philosophically.

"We're in God's hands still, just the same, old chap!" responded Sergius.

"Don't you think you'd better slant her up a trifle?" suggested the other. "We're pretty close to those tree-tops; and the first burst of the rain may beat us down."

"Right, as usual!" agreed Sergius, and lifted the quivering 'plane.

He seemed to be lifting her right into chaos, for at this moment the purple darkness overhead was torn across by a withering forked flame of blue-white. Upon the instant following blackness burst the thunder, crashing upon them till it seemed as if the aeroplanes must be beaten down by sheer intolerable sound. For one blinded second Sergius felt that he was falling, but instinct held the wheel true, and a dash of great rain, full in his face, cleared his senses. The rain passed at once; but behind it came a leaping, tortured wind that made the quivering monoplane wallow. He heard the voice of the American at his ear saying coolly:

"A pretty piece of handling, that, by Jing," and realized that, in some mysterious way, he had steered the machine successfully through the first crash of the conflict. Then, his every faculty—nerve, sense, muscle—seemed all at once to string themselves up to a pitch of preternatural efficiency; and with unerring wrist he warped his tips till the great dragon-fly, its wings undulating in swift, short curves, no longer wallowed, but hung quivering, level as a dart, in the eye of the gale. The thunder leaped and battered and roared above them, and the lightning darted over them like a shuttle, but he felt that he held the mastery of the wind in his grip.

"I'm glad the rain doesn't amount to any-

thing. It might have blinded me," he remarked. But he could not hear his own voice at the moment, so naturally he expected no reply from Carver.

Glancing downward, he was amazed to find himself now several hundred feet higher than he had intended to be. He was just wondering how any uprush of air could have volleyed him so far skyward without his knowing it, when a curious sensation at the pit of his stomach warned him that he was being let down again with even more precipitate abruptness. The tossed tree-tops jumped up to meet him through the course of a second that seemed eternity, then the awful drop ended, promptly but softly, as if on a cushion of air. At the same moment the thunder paused, and he heard Carver shouting: "Darn those holes in the air. There ought to be signs up, so a fellow wouldn't fly into them that way. They're bad for the nerves." He started to reply; but as he opened his mouth the raging beasts of the thunder broke loose again above his head, and he kept silent.

Having now the machine so well in hand, as far as steadiness was concerned, he was able to cast a rapid glance around for the biplane. He caught sight of it about a hundred feet below him, but far to the right, and, to his amazement, some distance ahead. It was rolling hideously, and bucking, and plunging; but it was almost over the edge of the cleared space. It had struck a different

streak of wind-current in the turmoil of the storm, and had battled up nearly to the goal. But it seemed beyond belief that any human hand and brain could hold the tormented machine many minutes longer from destruction. The heart of Sergius sent forth a passionate prayer for his friends' safety; then his attention was demanded at his own 'planes. A cross gust had slewed him from his course, and he was drifting over the tree-tops at a sharp diagonal. He was further from the landing-place than he had been five minutes before. When he had got the nose of the dragon-fly once more up into the wind, he saw that he would have to make now for the head of the field, instead of the foot.

But now, from his new angle, he could see the labouring Farman without turning his eyes too far from his own task. It was by this time well over the open, and cautiously, staggeringly, beating its way downward. At last it seemed to be within a few yards of earth. It plunged forward, swayed sickeningly to one side, and touched its left wing-tip. The wing seemed to crumple like paper. Sergius gasped. But Andrews somehow—or the wind—brought the other wing swooping forward, and the machine settled back on to its skids. The next instant it stopped, dipped its fore-plane, and stood upon its head. For one dreadful half-second it hung there, almost perpendicular, struggling to turn end over end, and crush its riders in the ruins. Then the wind, satisfied with victory,

beat it back level; and Andrews and Gregory sprang safely to the ground.

"Gee!" exclaimed a voice at Plamenac's ear; and then he realized that the thunder had stopped. The clouds were breaking up; the blue was shining serenely through the torn grey-purple rack; and the tossing forest-tops below were patched with sunlight. Moreover, the wind was becoming less violent, and altogether more reasonable. Boring her way into it with quivering persistence, his beautiful, triumphant white dragon-fly was nearing the field.

"There's not more than fifteen minutes more petrol in her," he said, over his shoulder, "but we're going to land beside Andrews and help ourselves to the poor old chap's supply. He and Gregory will have to walk the rest of the way!"

"Mr Sergius Charles de Plamenac," replied the American, irrelevantly, "allow me to say, while I think of it, that I take off my hat to you, and to any more there may be of your breed. It's plainly a good breed, and it ought to belong to the U.S.A. The man that can ride out a gale like that, in a winged match-box a thousand feet in the clouds, could sit steady on a Balkan throne. And if you don't appropriate said throne when the time comes, I'll raise a revolution in your hog-pastures, and just naturally *make* you!"

"Ah, old boy," rejoined Sergius, "there are better places than a throne, to my mind. Right here, right now, for instance. Don't

you think so? I thought you were my friend!"

They were over the upper edge of the field now; and Sergius, turning sharply, drove down across the wind toward the lower end, that he might make his landing head-on.

"You're right! I take it all back," said Carver.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT AT THE CROSSING

SECOND by second the wind was going down. At the lower end of the field the Antoinette swung about in a short circle, tipping her wide white wings like a wheeling gull. There was just wind enough now to make her seem to pause and hover, as she breasted it and then came slowly to earth beside the tilted wreck of the biplane. Both Andrews and Gregory were at her side as she stopped. Sergius and the American sprang down from their seats. The four men wrung hands in silence, their hearts too full to let the words come out.

At last Carver spoke.

"Gee," said he, his grey eyes dark and shining; "for an Effete Monarchy, Andrews, you put up a great fight. A dozen times I thought you two were gone. I guess my hair turned grey while I was watching you." And he felt his head whimsically.

Gregory turned adoring eyes upon his companion.

"He's done more than man can do!" he cried, in a sort of exaltation.

The Englishman gave an embarrassed laugh.

"It's a sorry kind of triumph that leaves us wallowing in our gore," said he, gazing sorrowfully at the wreck of his biplane. "Poor old machine, she's a bit clumsy for a tussle like that—gives too much hold to the wind. I must tell Farman to cut down his surfaces, and get more drive for his lift. Now what *I* call a victory is this of yours, Serge! Clean and tidy. You've come through that howling hell without a hair turned. And here your Antoinette sits purring as if it had been a picnic."

This speech—a long one for Andrews—relieved the tension.

"It would have been awful defeat," replied Prince Sergius, "if we'd had to fight five minutes longer. Our petrol's about done!"

"You'll have to take ours," said Andrews. "Gregory and I have been wanting to stretch our legs a bit—eh, captain?—so we'll walk. And here's your other bag of baubles."

Prince Sergius took the momentous leather bag, and strapped it securely to his waist as Andrews had had it. "All depends on us two now," said he, turning to the American.

"Exactly," responded the latter. "Now, while you fellows are transferring the petrol, I'll be giving the motor a look over to see if any of that rain flurry got in where it ought not to."

"How much petrol have you left, Bob?" asked the Prince.

"Oh, enough to carry you an hour and a

half, anyhow! How much further have you to go?"

Prince Sergius turned questioningly to the mountaineer.

"Another forty kilometres will put you over the Save, just beyond the Drina," answered Gregory. "And that's the place to aim for, if the Austrians should be after you, for they wouldn't dare follow you across, just there. We've always got a strong patrol on guard at that point."

Sergius and Carver climbed to their seats, then leaned down to grasp the hands of the two who were being left behind in the enemy's country.

"We'll wait for you at Shabatz," said Prince Sergius.

"If all goes well, we ought to make Shabatz to-morrow night, or next forenoon," said Gregory. Then motor and propeller broke into their great song, and the monoplane, darting forward over the firm turf of the pasture, soared into the air. Carver looked back and waved his hand. A moment later he saw Andrews and Gregory hasten to the wreck, and fumble in the box behind the seats. Then he turned his attention to the course which Prince Sergius was steering. It was directly south-west, a difficult course at this hour, being straight into the sun. Below them, far ahead, the woods broke away into tilled country; and a streak of distant water flashed golden white.

"I wish you'd pull the peak down further

over my eyes for me," said Sergius. "This light makes it hard to steer."

Carver complied. Then he looked back. Andrews and Gregory were just vanishing into the woods on the extreme right of the field. The wrecked aeroplane, snowy-white in the intense sunshine, looked poignantly solitary in the wide green emptiness of the pasture, the strangest derelict that time had yet recorded.

The white dragon-fly was still climbing into the blue.

"Why so high, now?" questioned the American. "Hadn't we better fly low, and not make ourselves so conspicuous?"

"I'm afraid there's no chance of not being seen, or heard, in this part of the country!" answered Sergius. "The only thing to do is let them look and be damned, and shoot if they want to. We'll fly so high there'll be little danger of them hitting us."

They were clear of the forests now, and passing above the outskirts of a straggling village which lined both banks of an extraordinarily crooked little stream.

"In proof that you're dead right, Plamenac," said Carver, scrutinizing the village with his glasses, "there's a squad of our friends squinting up at us now. It looks as if they were going to do more than squint. Let's see! How high are we? Fifteen hundred? I could bear to be a bit higher, myself. Those beggars *might* make a hit, you know. And think how inconvenient!"

"From where *they* are, it's a good three thousand feet!" answered Sergius, "and getting more every second."

"There they go, anyhow!" remarked the American, coolly. The flat crash of the volley rose faintly to their ears, just heard across the drone of the propeller.

"Wasting their ammunition!" he continued, after a pause.

"Well," said Sergius, "I'd like it better if they shoot worse! Look here ahead, just abaft the screw!"

"Gee!" ejaculated the American. A three-inch splinter had been flicked off the upper edge of the body, between the propeller and the motor.

"We may as well slide up another thousand, don't you think?" suggested Sergius, lifting the 'plane sharply. "It's a comfort to think we've lots of room overhead."

As they ran up the slopes of air the distant rivers came clearly into view, the broad, sprawling reaches of the Save, and the twisted coils of the Drina, flashing their summons to safety. With amazing speed they drew near, as if all the pictured side of the hollow bowl of the landscape were sliding inward and downward toward the bottom. Strung to the highest pitch of suspense and expectation as they were, their sense of time became confused. Before they could realize it, they were within three miles—within two miles—within a mile of the water. Then, all up and down the fields, parallel with the river-

bank, little groups of men in uniform came into view. They were gesticulating and pointing and staring upward toward the humming and darting 'plane.

"This is where we run the gauntlet I'm thinking," remarked the American, gazing downward through the glasses. Prince Sergius said nothing. Every faculty, every ounce of will within him, was concentrated on the effort to lift the machine across the zone of fire.

"Ah-h-h!" came a long-drawn exclamation from Carver, as the rifles spurted upward their tiny jets of flame. Something *pinged* shrilly past his head, a high note which stood out from the noise of propeller and motor. Then, with a grunting sob, the motor stopped dead.

Prince Sergius jerked up his lifting 'plane. In the sudden, startling silence the great white dragon-fly began her terrific descent.

"Struck the magneto!" said Prince Sergius. His voice sounded unnatural. Carver saw that his face was deadly pale.

"*You're* not hit?" he demanded.

"Only my leg!" answered Sergius, the strong ring returning to his voice, and the blood mounting back to his face. "Thank God it wasn't my arm! Are they going to fire again?"

"Don't look like it! They see they've winged us all right. I don't think they want to shoot us all to pieces, because they would kind of spoil us for curios."

"We were not more than a quarter of a mile from the river when we were hit," said Sergius, setting his teeth hard as the anguish awoke in his leg. "I believe I can keep her up till we're half-way over."

"Quite convenient for conversation, this unusual quiet!" suggested Carver, eyeing him with admiration, then sweeping the river with his glasses. "But as to where we strike the water I don't think it much matters; we'll be nabbed wherever we strike it, my boy. There's a little motor-boat piling *up* the river as if she had an engagement with us, and thought she was late. And there's a *big* motor-boat hustling *down* the river in almost as big a hurry. I *wish* we could stay up here."

Sergius twisted his mouth in a ghastly grin, but made no reply. He was nursing to the last inch every foot of glide which the monoplane had in her. They were well out over the water now; but it was coming up at them too fast.

"By Jing, I'd like to take a shot at some of those comfortable-looking swine," went on the American, itchingly lifting his rifle, and laying it down again abruptly. "But it would be a fool trick all right. Not unless *they* begin it again. But if they do—ah, there's a tubby gentleman in civilian's clothes, who seems very important. It is borne in upon me that he is at the bottom of all this disturbance. I don't want him to profit by it as much as he thinks he's going to.

Even at this distance, I can see he is what old Andrews would call a bounder. Well, if there's another shot fired, *you'll* go, my tubby friend; for I don't like your looks a little bit."

"It's de L'Orme—for a fiver!" gasped Prince Sergius, the torture of the smashed leg-bone mounting upwards into his thigh. They were half-way across the river; and not ten feet above the water. He jammed his elevating 'plane hard upward, lifting the dragon-fly's nose; and with a great rustling sigh, followed by a smacking splash, the machine settled level upon the current.

She floated. She was badly down by the nose, to be sure; but she floated. The Austrians were arriving all along the river-bank—the tubby gentleman in civilian dress conspicuous among the uniforms. On the opposite shore the Servian guard came down close to the water's edge, and looked on with amazement. It grieved them that they had no excuse to take a hand in the game. Down the river the little motor was coming on at a great pace. Up the river—but much further away—the big motor was also hurrying to the scene of excitement.

"Game's up! Shall we drop the parcels overboard?" suggested Carver.

"Oh," groaned Sergius, "if the dogs hadn't smashed my leg I could have swum ashore with both parcels."

"*I* couldn't swim more than *half* that distance!" said Carver, slipping off his shoes

as he spoke. "But I'll try it. Give me the other bag. If you make signs hard enough to your friends over on the shore, maybe they'll understand, and come to the rescue. Worth trying, eh?" And he threw off his coat.

At this moment the Austrians began firing again. Several bullets struck the 'plane—but most of the shots, to the amazement of Sergius and Carver, seemed to be directed at the little motor-boat, now almost upon them.

"Gee!" shouted the American, half rising, and just saving himself from toppling overboard, "They're friends!"

He sat down again, the bullets kicking up the water all around the 'plane. Coolly he lifted his rifle. As he fired, the civilian, who had been directing the attack upon the motor-boat, dropped. He fired again, aiming with quick deliberation, and a mounted officer rolled from the saddle. Then a shout from Prince Sergius distracted him just as he pulled the trigger, and his third shot went wide. Before he could shoot again the motor-boat had rounded to between him and his target, and was poking her beak up over the drowned wings of the aeroplane. To Carver's amazement, she had hoisted the Servian flag. And then, to his double amazement, he caught sight of Madame de L'Orme, crouched as flat as possible in the bottom of the boat.

"Come quick! Come quick!" she cried in a desperate voice.

"Gee!" said Carver, and caught the bow

of the boat with one hand, while he reached to help Sergius with the other. The water in the aeroplane was crimson where Sergius had been sitting, and his tight-shut lips said not a word as he dragged himself over the side and sank in the bottom of the boat. The American followed nimbly, seating himself beside Madame de L'Orme; and the boat darted for the Servian shore through a singing swarm of bullets. But having the Servian flag at her stern, she gave the Servian guard the excuse they were craving. Their flag had been assaulted. They opened fire enthusiastically, shooting high in order to reach the opposite shore; and the little boat, running under their fire, darted for the mouth of the Drina.

Forgetting her peril, Madame sprang up from her place of safety, ran forward, and knelt beside Prince Sergius, who lay with his eyes closed. She wrung her hands passionately.

"Oh—where is he hurt? What is it? What is it?" she wailed.

"It's his leg. Can't do a thing till we get him ashore!" said Carver; and resumed his deadly practice on the Austrians. The next moment Sergius opened his eyes. At the sight of Madame's face bending over him, he smiled, grasped her hand, and sat up. A glance at the Servian shore, now very close, showed him that the day was won. The pain fled from his face, leaving it alight with solemn joy.

"We have done it!" he muttered. Then, turning his eyes once more to Madame's face, as she knelt bending over him, he went on: "And it is *your* hand that snatches victory for us at the last! I am glad! You don't know the great thing you have done! I am glad it is your hand."

Madame had been dry-eyed; but now the tears rushed suddenly down her face.

"I've done the only great thing I care about, if I've helped you, if I've served you!" she sobbed.

The American looked at her, at the distortion of her beautiful face, and puckered his lips in a sudden, vast comprehension.

"And I'd thought all the time it was Andrews," he muttered.

Then the boat, which had run out of range a few hundred yards up the Drina, poked her nose softly into the bank. Carver, seeing that Sergius had fallen back unconscious, stooped to lift him.

"Don't be frightened," he said gently to Madame as she bent to aid him. "It's loss of blood. He'll be all right."

Swarthy men in the Servian uniform came hurrying down the bank to help. The steersman of the motor-boat, the blood dripping from his left sleeve, came forward grinning with triumph. Madame de L'Orme turned to the other side of the engine, leaned over a huddled heap, and gently shook it.

"Poor Andréas!" she muttered. She dried her eyes, and jabbed her handkerchief,

in a wet little ball, against her lips. Then she called two of the guards into the boat, and pointed to the dead man.

"He has died for his country," she said, simply; and turned to hurry after the little procession which was bearing Prince Sergius up the bank.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FARMHOUSE BY THE DRINA.

PRINCE SERGUIS did not go to Shabatz. They carried him to the nearest farmhouse, not far from the water-side. From Shabatz they summoned the army surgeon of the district to set and dress his leg, while Carver and Madame remained to nurse him. The night was hot, and the American justified all reports as to the madness of his countrymen by going about in his stifling aero-coat, of which the roomy lines hid two bulky protuberances at his waist. He was filled with admiration for the courage and efficiency which Madame had shown in her conduct of the rescue. But her reception of his eulogies left him hopelessly bewildered. She repudiated them desperately, crying: "Oh, you'd never even speak to me if you knew!" and fled from the room in a passion of tears. The American stepped outside, took his place by the open window, where he could keep his eye upon the patient, and lighted one of his inexhaustible cigars.

"Seem to be just as queer in Servia as they are in the U.S.A.!" he murmured, reminiscently. A few minutes later he mused aloud: "I wonder if she knows it was me

potted that tubby bounder when he was trying to kill her! If so, she don't seem to bear me any grudge! I *wonder* if she knows!"

Presently Madame reappeared, her emotion brought to hand. Her white face smiled upon him frankly, in the twilight, as she passed him to re-enter Plamenac's room. The American stopped her.

"I've a notion that Monsieur de L'Orme had something to do with messing up our expedition this way!" he said, in his direct fashion, scrutinizing her face with his strange bright eyes.

Madame's mouth hardened for an instant. She looked as if she were on the verge of explaining something. Then she said abruptly:

"Don't let us talk of *him!* He is dead."

She spoke very clearly and deliberately. Then she passed in to Plamenac's bedside.

"Wonder how she found it out so quick!" mused Carver.

About four o'clock next morning, Madame got up from her chair and blew out the night-light which stood on the floor beyond the foot of the Prince's bed. The surgeon had been there some hours before, and dressed the wound; and Sergius was sleeping. Carver, exhausted, was sleeping profoundly on a blanket in the further corner of the room. The window was open. A smell of violets and fresh, damp earth breathed coolly in. Madame crossed the uneven floor, and stood looking out upon the pink-and-amber miracle of the sunrise as it broke across the Drina

and the wide Bosnian plain. Plamenac's voice called to her, faintly; and she glided back to the bedside.

"What is it? Do you want anything?" she whispered.

"I want you to sit down by me. I want to thank you!"

She obeyed, putting her hand into his craving, outstretched palm as she did so.

"You risked so much—your life, everything—to save us!" he muttered, searching her face with eyes that would not be denied.

She bore that look for a moment, then turned away her face, gently withdrew her hand, and pressed at her throat as if it hurt her to swallow.

"It was all my fault—that you were spied upon," she said at last, in a very low voice, keeping her face averted.

She was silent for several minutes, while Sergius gazed at her intensely, and the coloured light flooded wonderfully across the bed.

"I cannot let you go on thanking me, and honouring me," she continued, her voice growing small and unresonant. "I was in the Austrian Secret Service—*a spy!* At the very beginning, after Gregory's visit to your rooms that day, I became suspicious, and gave warning at Vienna. I was sent to Paris to watch you. Oh, I was well, well paid! I worked quite independently of my—husband; and was paid much more than he. We detested each other, but had to work together—

had to seem to live together. In Paris I—I came to know you better, to know you and Captain Andrews better, and I began to understand how base a thing it was that I was doing. I understood. And I suffered—oh, I suffered! You will believe that, surely! But when I tried to draw back it was too late—they knew too much. When I refused to spy for them any longer, my—Monsieur de L'Orme went on with it. Then—then I tried to get back into favour with them, so I might find out what they were going to do, and warn you. And for *that* I was too late. They wouldn't trust me again. I could learn almost nothing. But, oh, I *did* warn you as well as I could. And just at the last I found out in time. For that, perhaps, you will come to despise me less some day."

She buried her face in her hands, and her shoulders shook with dry, strangling sobs.

After a moment, Prince Sergius spoke.

"You were not one of us—you were not a Servian, you know!" he said. "So, you must remember, you were not a *traitor.*"

She made no answer to this. She kept her face covered; but her sobs gradually ceased, because she had caught no note of scorn in Plamenac's feeble voice. Presently he spoke again.

"I think you have very much more than made amends—to Servia. Oh, yes—many times over. What you did was *everything.* And was that—was that the only reason you did it—to make amends?"

Neither to this did she make reply.

"*Please* give me your hand again!" he begged, his voice growing feebler. She gave it to him, still keeping her face averted. He tried to pull her towards him—but feebly. She realized how feebly, and turned and looked into his eyes. What she saw there told her plainly that it was all the strength he had—that he was trying with all his heart to draw her to him, though his hands were so weak. At his weakness her eyes ran over. "Oh, my dear!" she sobbed; and bending swiftly she gathered his head into her arms.

PART III

CHAPTER I

IT WORKS

After the long silent strain, and the loud, swift, melodramatic triumph on a stage that seemed suddenly set for it as if Fate had an eye for effect, came a calm that was almost incredible. Apparently, for a little while, there was no hurry about anything more, as if time were waiting on Prince Plamenac's recovery. With incredible ease, and apparently without pursuit of any kind—perhaps because an English officer, under the circumstances, would have been an inconvenient captive to explain—Andrews and Gregory made their way through the forests, gained the shore of the Danube, and crossed over safely into Servia by night in the boat of a sympathetic Slav fisherman. It was not a convenient season for either Austria or Servia to make much of the fight over the aeroplane, so after some *sotto voce* recrimination the matter was tacitly accepted as a misunderstanding between patrols, and discreetly allowed to drop. Within a few days the precious leathern packets which had so spoiled the set of Wesley Carver's coat, were safe in Pla-

menac's strong box in the vaults of the Government Bank at Nish; and the lethargy of reaction settled down upon all the actors of the fantastic, incredible drama—except upon the Prince and Madame de L'Orme.

As soon as Plamenac was well enough to be moved, he was taken to his old family home—half monastery, half mansion—on the banks of the M'latza. Madame de L'Orme's mother was summoned from Paris; and within less time than the etiquette of a more sophisticated part of the world might have prescribed, Madame and the Prince were married. Leaving them to their honeymoon, Andrews, Carver, and Gregory took their departure from M'latza—Carver for America, to set his affairs in order, so that he might come back and take a further hand in the great game; Andrews for Cetinje, to take counsel on Plamenac's behalf with the poet-monarch of the Black Mountain, and to startle the ever-needy Montenegrin treasury with promise of abundance; and Gregory for Macedonia, to whisper a word in the ears of the rival Greek and Bulgarian bands that should moderate their zeal for cutting each other's throats and prepare them to unite against a common foe.

The problem of converting his vast treasure of diamonds into cash and credit, without smashing the market and arousing a dangerous furore in the world, was one that perplexed Plamenac for a time. But the diplomacy of Madame came to his aid in this,

as it was to do in many future difficulties. And in the end the matter became quite simple. The De Beers Syndicate, in conjunction with certain great diamond dealers of Amsterdam, St Petersburg, and Paris, took over the whole store of gems at a fair valuation, and locked them up, to be fed out to the market discreetly without disturbing the prices either of diamonds themselves or of South African shares. The huge proceeds, partly in cash, but for the most part in the form of gilt-edged and fairly liquid securities, were prudently distributed between the Bank of England, the Bank of France, and the Bank of Holland.

And then, little by little, and with no obtrusive acclaim, the power began to work. The old monastery-mansion on the M'latza became a centre of hospitality—of a reserved, discriminating hospitality which was not heralded in any society columns. The guests, never more than three or four at a time, were at first exclusively Servian or Montenegrin, statesmen and soldiers for the most part, or members of the reigning house of either State. Almost at once the army estimates of both States began to grow, their armies began to be reorganized and expanded, and orders were placed abroad, on a generous scale, for all kinds of equipment—especially in France, for the admirable quick-firing artillery of the Creusot works. Such costly activity on the part of two small and notoriously impecunious States could not, of

course, be quite hidden from the eyes of the diplomatic world. It was generally considered to have its origin in the stealthy benevolence of Russia, and therefore regarded with uneasiness. But Russia, though no one believed her protestations, was strictly honest in denying all knowledge or comprehension of the matter. Only at the Ballplatz was there any accurate guessing at the truth, and the Ballplatz chose to keep its suspicions strictly to itself.

As the prestige of Servia began to rise in the eyes of her Balkan neighbours, to whom nothing appealed so instantly as military effectiveness, the working of the power began to manifest itself more widely. At the little house-parties of Prince Plamenac, distinguished Greeks were sometimes to be met, and Bulgarian dignitaries deep in the confidence of the ambitious and inscrutable King Ferdinand. After a few of these quiet gatherings, an event took place which the world had long scoffed at as impossible—an event which, had it become known, would have made many Chancelleries sit up anxiously. The old scores between Serb and Greek and Bulgar were sponged off the slate. Then King Ferdinand, tirelessly vigilant for every occasion to aggrandize and strengthen his new throne, began delicately to loosen the ties that bound him to Austria, and made ready to throw in his lot with his Balkan neighbours. Greece set herself with sudden energy to the reorganization of all her

forces, by land and sea alike, and gratified the Great Powers by becoming rigidly "correct" in regard to the Cretan Deputies, who strove to defy their Turkish suzerain by claiming seats in the Parliament at Athens. The fact that the Cretans accepted this rebuff without an outburst of rage, might well have aroused some suspicions in the diplomatic world; but in truth the Powers were so sick of the Cretan question that they were only too glad of anything that seemed to postpone its re-opening. They patted Greece on the back, and refrained from trying to find out anything that they might not, for the moment, like to know.

Meanwhile, however, there was one Balkan State which was not admitted to the house parties on the M'latza. Rumania was left as much in the dark as any of the Great Powers themselves. She was under suspicion of too great friendship for the Turk, and of a susceptibility to German influence. Moreover, there was no part of Turkish territory with which she could well be rewarded in case of a division of spoils; and, on the other hand, she was known to covet a slice of Bulgarian lands. A strange, alien island of Latin speech and blood, set apart in the ocean of Slavic people, it was not unnatural that she should be distrusted, however, perhaps, undeservedly.

But there is one thing that cannot be done in a day, whatever gold be spent upon the effort. An army must have time to grow,

however good the raw material. There is something more even than the company drill, the learning to shoot straight, the training in the deadly niceties of the high-power, quick-firing modern artillery. There must be time for the slow spread of that vital something which makes of an army an organic whole. And being well aware of this, the sagacious leaders from Sofia, Belgrade, Athens, Cetinje, who frequented the monastery-mansion on the M'latza and consumed much tea à l'Anglaise with the Princess de Plamenac, were not desirous of being unduly hurried. Beyond an accasional protest against the wrongs of the Christians in Thrace and Macedonia, no activity was allowed to show. The protests were duly lodged at Constantinople, and duly procrastinated to death by the Sublime Porte, according to Turkish custom. But in truth, nothing more had been expected, or even, perhaps, desired. The protests were designed for future reference. The policy of the deliberators on the M'latza was to make haste slowly.

But one thing they had neglected to reckon for. The unexpected. It was so utterly unexpected. And they were not yet ready. In 1911 Italy declared war upon the Turk, and annexed Tripoli. It was a great opportunity; but it came a year or two too soon for its warmest welcome. However, it resulted in turning away inquisitive eyes. A great tranquillity appeared to settle down upon Bulgaria, Servia, Montenegro, and Greece. It

this convenient obscurity the work of preparation went on with quiet, but urgent, haste; and the understanding between the four States was solidified into a definite alliance, whose object was the shattering of the Turkish power in Europe.

CHAPTER II

KUMANOVA

CAME the summer of 1912, and with it the news that Turkey was considering the question of making peace with Italy. It was borne in upon the secret councils beside the M'latza that there was no more time to be let slip. Such readiness as there was must suffice. The hour was striking, and in Sofia, Belgrade, Athens, Cetinje there was a sudden strange stir. Men seemed to awake. They looked at each other with surprised, significant, exultant eyes. The quiet men in remote villages, the stolid-looking, sheepskin-clad peasants on their scattered farms, took down their guns, set themselves to whetting their long knives. The bare-legged or red-stockinged women went about with old war-songs on their lips. The Great Event was beginning to move.

Then, in September, the world was startled into consciousness that things were happening in the Balkans. To the amazement of the Great Powers, the impossible had been brought to pass. The jealous little Balkan States were revealed standing shoulder to shoulder. They were making demands of Turkey—demands so peremptory that there

was small chance of the Turks, already humiliated enough under the Italian scourge, lending anything like a complaisant ear to them. The allies required immediate and stringent guarantees for the redress of all grievances in Macedonia.

The Turks, in their folly, were delighted. Fatuously despising their small challengers, they imagined an opportunity to repair their sorely frayed prestige by a series of swift and crushing victories in Thrace and Macedonia. Having nothing more to hope in Tripoli, they made peace with Italy, in order to have their hands quite free for more congenial work in the north. They smiled with lofty satisfaction, returned a reply which veiled its insolence in diplomatic courtesy, and began hurrying troops and supplies into Adrianople.

But the Chancelleries of the Great Powers —the so-called Concert of Europe—were not pleased at all. They were desperately afraid of complications—of each other, in fact—if Turkey were to be involved in a new war. "This will never do," they said, and put down their collective foot impressively. But no one seemed greatly impressed. The Allies, as well as the Turks, agreed most civilly that war would be a dreadful thing, and that nothing would grieve them more than to find themselves compelled to resort to it; but they went on busily with their preparations. Then the Powers began to scold like a lot of nervous old women. The Allies were solemnly assured that if they should conquer any

territory from Turkey they would never be allowed to retain a foot of it. The Allies continued civil, even deprecatory, and went on concentrating. The Turks were assured that if they should fight a victorious war they would not be allowed to profit by it in any way. The Turks were courteous, and went on hurrying forces into Adrianople Saloniki, Monastir, Uskub, Scutari. Convicted of impotence, the Powers sat back and eyed each other suspiciously, as who should say: "Aha, I believe it is you who are back of all this!"

Then the Allies delivered something like an ultimatum. Turkey, in a moment of insight, tried to detach Greece from the alliance by an offer to yield up Crete. Greece smilingly declined, having very much more than Crete in view. Every one waited in breathless expectancy for the match to be set to the mine. And Montenegro—whose shrewd old poet-prince, Nicholas, had recently proclaimed himself king in order to be ready for all emergencies, grew impatient of what seemed to her eager mountaineers a needless procrastination. She declared war all by herself, flung her impetuous little armies over the frontier, and amazed an incredulous world by collecting villages, fortresses, and an embarrassment of prisoners from the supposedly irresistible Turk. For days, however, she carried on the fight alone, utterly without support, while her allies suavely negotiated. Foolish prophets began to whisper that she

was about to be betrayed, to be thrown as a sop to the outraged and now thoroughly aroused monster beside the Bosphorus.

Then at last, late in October, all masks were thrown aside. As if at the lift of one central and controlling hand the great synchronized machines began to move. The eager armies of Servia, Bulgaria, and Greece crossed the frontiers and rolled forward along the mainways, closing in upon the centres of Ottoman power.

Very complacently Constantinople waited, expecting the triple wave to shatter itself on the rock of Turkish invincibility. There were dreams of the Crescent rising again over Sofia, Athens, Belgrade. Said one high dignitary of the Ottoman Government to an interested foreign Ambassador: "They are nothing to us, these slaves. They will not dare to stand before us. The Bulgars, if you like, can perhaps fight, a little. *Mais nous ne nous préoccupons pas de la Bulgarie.*" Turkish officers made supper engagements for Sofia and Belgrade—Athens was quite too out of the way. There were pleasant conjectures as to what sort of dancing-girls the Servian and Bulgarian women might make.

Then—Kumanova! Kirk Kilisse! And everything was changed. In a day, as it were in a breath, a new power had arisen in Europe—the Balkan confederacy, a thing to be reckoned with. The Chancelleries rubbed their eyes, and said: "Dear me!" But there it was, exultant, defiant, not to be ex-

plained away. At its touch the Ottoman Empire, that ancient Empire of the Sword, good for naught if not for war, was crumbling. So strangely and so swiftly had they worked, those bright baubles from Gregory's tobacco pouch, those leathern packets which had lain beneath the muck of Mother Maria's hog-pens. No wonder Austria seethed with rage, at the sight of the sudden giant barrier flung across her intended path to Saloniki.

* * * * * *

From Nisch, the Servian head-quarters, the main Servian army, after clearing its flank by the capture of Mitrovitza and Prishtina, hurled itself straight upon Uskub, the ancient Serb capital, and the chief centre of the Turkish northern forces. The Sanjak of Novi Bagar was already overrun by Montenegrins from the west and Servians from the east, and there had been some sharp fighting, ending always with the defeat of the Turks. The important town of Prishtina had offered a fierce, though brief, resistance; and the Servian columns were flushed with success. But nothing as yet had afforded any real test of the respective fighting qualities, man for man, of the opposing races. It was for the most part Arnauts only—the valorous and fanatical, but undisciplined, Moslem Albanians—who had hitherto striven to stay the onset of the Serbs. And the immeasurably superior strategy and readiness of the Serbs had enabled them to crush flat all opposition by

overwhelming numbers. But what Europe was waiting for was the crash to come when the Servian wave should break on the rock of the invincible Turkish regular. It was prophesied with confidence that the wave would roll back shattered. Critics all over Europe —military critics of myopic vision, equipped rather with club gossip and shallow prejudice than with historic knowledge or foresight— proclaimed freely that the Serb could never stand up to the Turk in a locked battle. The Turk, they announced sapiently, was a gentleman. Victory was his by tradition and by right. The Serb was a serf, and would cringe before the eye of his natural master.

The road to Uskub lay through Kumanova. Between Kumanova and the advancing Servian front that road was commanded by a group of entrenched positions, which centred upon Rujanatz, and were held by a strong force of Turkish regulars and Albanians. On the morning of October 18, the Servian front came in contact with this force before Rujanatz, and was greeted by a withering artillery fire. General Patnik, who held the responsible command, although the Crown Prince, Alexander, was the nominal leader, hurriedly entrenched his battalions and brought up his batteries, and a fierce duel of artillery raged all day. The Turkish field-guns were numerous and well served, and they had the overwhelming advantage of position. Toward dusk, under cover of their fire, the Turkish lines advanced to within a

few hundred yards of the Servian entrenchments.

All day the Serb infantry had lain close in the trenches while the shells screamed over their heads, and gusts of shrapnel scourged them as the Turkish gunners hit upon the range. They took their losses coolly, passing back the wounded and closing up sudden gaps in their lines. They fretted savagely, however, at the inaction, their fingers itching for the bayonet.

But their commander knew them, and knew them as of far other mettle than their critics conceived them to be. He knew that the fire which burned as one flame from heart to heart throughout his waiting lines was the thirst for racial vengeance. He knew that no long range fighting could quench this thirst. In his own veins he felt their fury—the lust to meet the old foe face to face, at close grip, steel to steel, and wash out in blood the burning memory of shame and scorn and outrage.

Therefore, Patnik had waited. He had waited till the Turks were near enough to be clearly seen, as individual foes, there creeping up under the chill autumn twilight. Now he gave the word to fix bayonets and charge.

Then, there in the mountainous dusk, in the wide sweeps of shadowed gloom, across the glimmering spaces of the open level, under the shattering thunder of the guns and the screech of the shrapnel, in the face of the blue-white, jetting volleys, was stamped into dust the myth of the Turk's invincibility. To the

amazement of the men in the red fez, their despised adversaries were upon them with the steel, stern, and not to be denied. For a little while the Turks stood up to it, in a yelling mêlée of thrust and stab and grapple. Then, in the thickening dark, the fezzes wavered. Panic ran along their shaken lines. They broke. Flinging away rifles, knapsacks, belts, and coats, they fled in dreadful confusion from the Serb bayonets. It was the first lesson in a terror hitherto strange to the Ottoman heart. On the following day the remaining Turkish positions about Rujanatz were captured easily; and the Servian army had a clear way before it to Kumanova.

At Kumanova the Turkish army lay in force, strongly entrenched, supported by the most modern and efficient guns. Here, said the Pashas, we bar the road to Uskub, we teach these rebel slaves their place, we avenge the petty defeats of our scattered outposts. On the morning of the 22nd, their batteries opened fire upon the advance guard of the Serbs, who deployed swiftly, as they came within range, among the fields to either side of the Vranja road. Patnik hurried forward his quick-firing artillery, posted it on the ridges which flanked the road, and strove to pound the Turkish batteries into silence. He was not ready to come to grips, for his main columns had not yet arrived. When they came up they dug themselves hastily into entrenchments, for Patnik had felt out the strength of the Turkish position, and un-

masked the power of his batteries; and he had taken the measure of the task before him.

Flushed with the memory of their triumphant charges on the field of Rujanatz, the Servian infantry fretted to be sent against the opposing lines with the bayonet. But the Turkish rifle-fire was so concentrated, their artillery so well served, that the first charges melted away long before they could come to close quarters. To such slaughter, Patnik called a halt, and redoubled the hammering of his batteries. The night of the 22nd fell with the Turks holding their own, while the shallow Servian trenches were creeping steadily forward, and the Servian mountain-guns being dragged audaciously to the crests of certain broken ridges toward the right, whence on the morrow they might rip the enemy's left flank.

The following day was one of prolonged give and take, with terrible punishment on both sides. From time to time, under a storm of shell, the Servians would rush and take some advanced position, only to find it untenable, and to be driven out by a focussed fire from Turkish trench and battery. Attempted bayonet charges were broken by the sheeted hail of lead before ever the hungry steel could reach its target. There seemed little visible gain on this day to the invading army, but the men were not cast down by this apparent check. They were fired with enthusiasm, from time to time, by the reckless ardour of Crown Prince

Alexander, who exposed himself freely among them in the most advanced trenches, firing with the men's rifles, assuring them that they should soon have their desire and be let loose with the steel. And meanwhile, Patnik was throwing his lines ever closer and closer, that his men might have their way without paying too murderous a price for it.

Up till perhaps noon of Thursday, the 24th, the Turks may have imagined that they were making good. At some points they had been driven in; but their guns were unsilenced, their line of defence unbroken. They waited, probably, for the wave of their assailants to waste its force. But by now the attacking trenches were so near that the Serbs could see the faces of their foes, the long, bobbing lines of red fezzes that were the symbol of all they burned to be avenged upon. They were near enough now to have a chance of crossing the deadly open before the rain of bullets and shrapnel should have time to mow them down. They waited, straining, for the word to charge.

The word came. Shouting exultantly they leapt from the trenches. And then, in silence, with fixed bayonets, they ran up, every man straight before him, in the face of the streaming death.

Over the heaped bodies of their comrades they rushed on, the ranks thinning horribly as they went. And as they closed in, the Turks, though veterans, began to quail before this voiceless rage. They gained the trenches,

and there, for a little, they were checked, the Turk's pride, his ancient love of the fight, and his ancestral scorn of his adversary, holding him up to the desperate grapple; and men were seen tearing at each other's throats with the naked hands. The Turkish artillerymen stood to their guns till they were cut down to a man. Then at last the Turks cried out that all was against them. Their hearts melted like water at the darting bayonets, the implacable, grim faces behind the bayonets. They turned and fled in a very madness of panic, throwing away everything they could get rid of that they might run the faster.

The fugitives were by now so cowed that they carried their terrors with them even into Uskub. Here they infected the fresh troops of the garrison with their panic. All discipline dissolved. Battalions which had not yet seen a Servian uniform fell to pieces at word of the approach of the Servian steel. The whole army fled away, like the flood of a broken dam, along the road to Monastir. They carried nothing with them—they could not spare the time. And the Servians, marching triumphant and unopposed into the old capital of their race, took a splendid booty of guns, ammunition, and stores, including a number of powerful field-guns of their own, purchased in France, which the Turks had prudently confiscated in transit at Saloniki before the outbreak of the war.

The war was now hardly more than a week old. Already Kossovo was avenged. The

black sheep pastures where, five hundred years ago, the glory of Servia had gone down in blood, were cleansed of their stain. The capital of the splendid empire of Stephen the Great was redeemed from the Crescent, and once more hailed a Servian king. The first part of the work for which Plamenac and his adventurous comrades had run the air, was accomplished. Servia, in a week's war, was already become a power in the world's eyes. So swift and so irresistible was the working of those leathern packets which Gregory had buried in the muck of Mother Maria's hog-pens.

CHAPTER III

KIRK KILISSE AND LULE BURGAS

In the meantime, while the exultant Servians were smashing down all resistance with such dramatic instancy and power, and little Montenegro was tightening her iron embrace upon the long-coveted prize of Scutari—even as the inexorable star-fish enfolds the reluctant oyster—the other two members of the newly-revealed confederacy were playing their part to the amazement of a startled world.

Up to now, one of the pet imbecilities of the club-room wiseacre and the arm-chair critic had been the dictum that "the Greeks are no good." This sapient conclusion was based entirely on the fact that when, in 1897, their little army, ill-equipped, half organized, almost wholly untrained, had been so mad as to try conclusions with a force of first-class Turkish troops outnumbering it several times over, it had been beaten, swiftly, thoroughly, and deservedly. It was like an old gun-boat standing up to a ship of the line. But the Turks themselves, unlike their club-room eulogists, were under no illusion as to the fighting qualities of the lithe and eager men of Hellas. When they declared war on Bulgaria, Servia, and Montenegro, they

ostentatiously excluded Greece from the declaration, and tried to bribe her to desert her allies.

The answer of Athens was to pour her troops over the frontier at Elassona, sweep the defenders of the passes before them at the bayonet point as the Serbs had done at Rujanatz and Kumanovo, and march straight on Saloniki. In blow after blow they rolled up the red-fezzed battalions, flattened them, trod them under—at Elassona, at Servia, at Verria, at Janitza, at Plati Bridge. They out-manœuvred and out-flanked their astonished adversary, who had not looked for any such stern insistence. They drove him with the bayonet, and to be driven before the bayonet is the most demoralizing of all routs. In their swift advance they established such an ascendancy that when at length they appeared before Saloniki, that great city, second only in importance to Constantinople, the jewel of Macedonia, the desire of Austria, the centre of the Young Turk movement, the queen of the Ægean, surrendered with its garrison of thirty thousand men without firing a shot.

Meanwhile, the Greek fleet, small but efficient, was holding absolute command of the Ægean, and occupying at its leisure the storied islands which by every right of race and of renown belonged to the Crown of the Hellenes. Crete beheld her heart's desire accomplished. The ports of Asia Minor, effectively blockaded, could send no trans-

ports of Asiatic troops to help the Turks in Thrace. And the Turkish fleet, nominally far superior, both in numbers and weight of metal, to its agile foe, was bottled securely within the Sea of Marmora, not daring to show itself outside the Dardanelles lest the Greeks should pounce upon it.

And what of Bulgaria, most populous and most powerful of all the four confederates. most dubious and most dour in her policy, most obdurate and self-seeking in her purpose? With the heaviest battalions behind her, and holding her seat at the very gates of Constantinople, to her had fallen, of necessity, the heaviest task of the whole colossal adventure. It was hers to strike straight at the heart of the Ottoman Empire; while before her, on her very threshold, lay the great fortress-city of Adrianople, with the whole main army of the Turk securely based upon it.

It was the post of the Turk's own choosing, long prepared against just such event. And Bulgaria, in grim silence, the sandals of her peasant regiments marching softly, flung herself against it.

In three columns the Bulgarian army poured through the defiles of the mountains before Adrianople, clearing them of their defenders, and capturing the important position of Mustafa Pasha, where they promptly established their base. Even before the Turks had ceased gasping at the sudden ferocity of the onslaught, the Bulgars had rushed a

number of the outlying defences of Adrianople, and were opening their batteries upon the inner line of forts. Furiously the Turks sallied from the fortress and hurled themselves upon the audacious invaders, thinking to smash them back upon the mountains. But what the Bulgars took they set firm teeth into. Every sortie of the garrison was repulsed with tremendous loss; and upon the heels of each repulse the invaders crept a little closer in.

It was the universal impression throughout the world that the supreme effort of the Bulgars would be put forth against Adrianople itself, with the object of clearing that disastrous barrier from the path of a direct advance upon Constantinople. The strength of the Turks was disposed accordingly. But General Savoff, the Bulgar commander-in-chief, had devised a strategy far swifter, subtler, and more audacious.

The right flank of the Turkish army rested on the fortified town of Kirk Kilisse, some thirty miles to the east of Adrianople, and was held in force by Mahmoud Mukhtar Pasha, with the advance divisions of the Third Army Corps. The outer defences were very strongly held, among those chains of hills to the north which make the Town of the Forty Churches a natural fortification. On the 18th, just at the time when the Servians, at the other extremity of the seat of war, were beginning that series of engagements which culminated in the triumph of

Kumanova—the Bulgarians opened their attack upon these outlying defences. They followed the same tactics as the Servians, opening with heavy artillery fire, and then the bayonet. But they had a stronger position before them, and better-defended trenches, and again and again the charging lines were shattered and rolled back by the murderous fire which met them in the teeth. But repulse had no daunting for those grim and square-jawed battalions. One after another the hill crests were taken, and the Bulgarian heavy artillery established itself face to face with the main fortifications. These were bombarded till their fire began to slacken. Then, on the morning of the 24th—the day of *Kumanova*—the Bulgarian infantry was sent against the guns.

In a hell of shrapnel and rifle fire they charged up the slopes of death. Again and again they were thrust back. But they had no acquaintance with fear, these patriot soldiers; and each rebuff but made them the more dangerous. They threw away everything they carried, their knapsacks, water-bottles, heavy coats, that they might reach the foe more swiftly, and thrust with the steel more freely. Seven times they were thrown back by the storm of lead and shell. But the eighth charge got home. When the bayonets were upon them, the Turks, for the most part, broke and fled. The veterans, too proud to run, died with their clutch on the invaders' throats. The rest went to pieces in

hopeless panic, and streamed away down the Bunar Hissar road. A large body was successfully withdrawn back to Adrianople; but all the immense stores of food, forage and ammunition gathered at Kirk Kilisse for the proposed invasion of Bulgaria, with seven batteries of modern quick-firers and thirty heavy guns, fell into the hands of the victors. And the panic-stricken fugitives, flying south toward Constantinople, carried tales of the Bulgars' bayonet charges to shake the nerves of the regiments which had not yet had to face them. The cry of "The knife! They come with the knife!"—as soon as that cry was raised the lines of the red-fezzed Redifs would begin to waver.

While the victors were securing themselves in Kirk Kilisse their scouts brought word that three divisions of the Turkish First Corps were hurrying up in three sections, in hope of retrieving the disaster. Upon these fresh troops General Savoff instantly launched his weary but triumphant regiments. He caught each division in detail, at Jenidjeh, at Kavakli, at Islamkuei, and crumbled them to a frantic, fleeing rabble. Then the main strength of the Bulgarian first and third columns swung down toward Lule Burgas, aiming to cut the railway and complete the isolation of Adrianople; while a heavy detachment thrust on toward Bunar Hissar, aiming to roll up Abdullah's army yet again by the right flank.

Five days after the capture of Kirk Kilisse began the great three-day battle of Lule

Burgas, the battle which utterly broke the main army of the Turks, and drove it reeling back behind the lines of Tchataldja, on the very threshold of the Imperial City itself.

Lule Burgas is a little Mohammedan village set deep in a valley of those endless, naked downs which ridge the Thracian Peninsula in a succession of waves all the way to the environs of Constantinople. The importance of Lule Burgas was due to the fact that it was the base of the new Turkish line of defence, forced upon Abdullah by the defeat at Kirk Kilisse. The new Turkish front was about thirty miles in width, its left covering the Adrianople-Constantinople railway to Baba Eski, and its right planted in the ridges near Bunar Hissar. The centre, at Lule Burgas, was held by Ahmed Bouk Pasha with the hitherto unmauled Fourth Corps.

On the 29th, the Bulgarian artillery opened a concentrated fire upon the positions of Bouk Pasha, while at the same time attacking along the whole thirty miles of front. Their insistence at the centre was too deadly to be denied, and after suffering murderous losses the Turks stampeded from the town, leaving most of the ammunition for their guns behind them. For the moment, too, they were driven from the ridges behind the town. The Bulgarian troops poured down into the valley, and their flag went up over the minaret of Lule Burgas. The Turks, with fresh ammunition for their quick-firers, rallied to

their ridge, and they made the captured town too hot to hold. The Bulgarians drew back to their own ridges opposite; and Lule Burgas lay there empty in the October sunshine, while the rival batteries hammered each other across the deserted valley.

For three days the life-and-death struggle went on. In the direction of Bunar Hissar, the Turks were encouraged by some minor successes, the weight of the Bulgar attack having suddenly unmasked itself on the left of the Turkish position. A strong column swept down upon Baba Eski. The Turkish cavalry intervened heroically, but were cut to pieces. The railway was carried, the Bulgarians entrenched themselves astride it, and Adrianople, with its garrison, was securely bottled up.

And now Abdullah Pasha, seeing that the doom of his army was imminent, resolved upon a desperate counter-offensive in the hope of breaking up the dogged pressure on his centre. Of the four Army Corps under his command, the Second, though it had endured some terribly severe handling, was the only one he dared trust for the supreme effort. Suddenly, and without any warning, he ordered its first two divisions from their trenches and hurled them upon the Bulgarian lines at the village of Turk Bej.

At this point the Bulgars had been so comparatively inactive as to give an impression that they were not in great force. The great Turkish advance went on at first, wave after

wave, with a weight that seemed irresistible. Then, from covert and hidden trench broke out such a hell of rifle-fire that the splendid rush of the Turks was brought to a halt, quivering. The lines threw themselves flat, and waited for the storm to expend itself. A lull; and they sprang up and rushed on again. Again the storm smote them, a sheeted rain of lead. Again they dropped. Again they sprang up and plunged forward. It was the last effort of gallant and desperate men, of men burning to retrieve the disasters which had fallen upon them. But their venture was hopeless from the first. At length they realized it. They turned—what was left of them—and sped back for cover; and the hail of death leaped after them till they topped the merciful shelter of the ridge. Almost immediately the whole Turkish army, shattered and demoralized, was flying toward Tchataldja and the shelter of its trusted fortifications. Bouk Pasha, holding the Fourth Corps sternly in hand, saved it from the general rout, and withdrew it in good order, keeping up so resolute a rear-guard defence that the victors, exhausted with their own gigantic efforts, were unable to effectively harass the retreat. The Turkish battalions at Bunar Hissar came racing back to swell the rout. The battle of Lule Burgas was won.

Macedonia was free. Thrace was free. There was no longer a Turkish Empire in Europe; but only a stricken army, and an abashed, despairing city, huddled behind the

Tchataldja lines, away down in the toe of the peninsula, beside the silver Bosphorus.

* * * * * *

The armistice had been signed in the restaurant car before the lines of Tchataldja—the armistice between Turkey on the one hand, and Bulgaria, Servia, and Montenegro on the other. Greece had been left out. She had refused to sign, ostensibly on the ground that her allies had not consulted her fully in regard to the terms of the armistice, and that her special interests had not been adequately safeguarded in the terms of it. There were sensational rumours of a rupture in the alliance—of Greece having been flung to the wolves for peace sake. As a matter of fact, the abstention of Greece was a brilliant piece of strategy on the part of the Allies. The Greek fleet having command of the Ægean, Greece was beyond the reach of Turkish attack, and she was free to keep the Turkish ports securely sealed up from supplies while negotiations should be in progress, a task which she most efficiently carried out. The peace delegates were in London, trying to arrange terms for bringing the war to an end.

* * * * * *

In the old monastery-mansion by the banks of the M'latza were gathered Plamenac and his princess, and Andrews, and Wesley Carver. Gregory was not there, for he lay in a soldier's grave at Podgoritza. Returning in his monoplane from an audacious reconnoitring flight above the Turkish posi-

tions at Scutari, a well-timed burst of shrapnel from the guns on Tarabosch had brought him down from his eagle height, crashing to earth just before the Montenegrin lines. His name and his fame were already the theme of heroic song among his native mountains.

Plamenac, during the war, had been with the Bulgarian head-quarters staff, in the neighbourhood of Adrianople. He had taken no part in the actual fighting, because, as the sagacious Reconciler of Rivalries, the consummate Adjuster of Difficulties, he carried so much responsibility that his country would not suffer him to risk his life. Andrews, as we have seen, had been with the Servians, at Kumanova, at Monastir, and on the hazardous dash through Albania to the Adriatic. Wesley Carver had been with the Greeks, who, of all the confederates, most appealed to his imagination. In his Bristol biplane—for he had lost his early enthusiasm for the Antoinette—he had made many a brilliant scouting expedition for the Greek army in its splendid march to Saloniki.

Word had just come that the Turkish delegates, after weary haggling, had been brought to accept all the main demands of the Allies, except the surrender of Adrianople. The dogged insistence of Bulgaria upon the possession of Adrianople seemed alone to stand in the way of peace.

Wesley Carver was impatient; and he had absorbed, unconsciously, some of that not altogether unnatural suspicion of the Buglar,

which was so deeply rooted in the hearts of his Greek friends.

"Who would ever have thought," said he to Plamenac, looking at the princess over his tea-cup, "that the world would be so upset and so much work cut out for the map makers just by our little trip to Mother Maria's hog-pens that day, three years ago. If only, now, those pig-headed chaps at Sofia could be brought to reason, and would consent to some compromise on Adrianople, we'd see the work of you and poor old Gregory done up in great shape, and all our dreams come true without the chance of a slip-up. Those Bulgarians make me hot under the collar."

"You mustn't forget," said Andrews, "that they've had by far the heaviest job to tackle, and that they've tackled it like heroes."

"And they've had by far the most terrible losses," added Madame.

"The great point is," said Plamenac, "to keep our eyes steadily on what must take place after peace is concluded between the Allies and Turkey. Then comes the division of the spoils. Bulgaria, of course, is the danger point. She is surely going to demand much more than her fair share, and to demand it obstinately; for she is ambitious to dominate the Balkans. She may quite conceivably over-reach herself, and drive us all to unite against her, in which case she would find herself in hot water, for Rumania would surely join hands with us to check her.

But as matters stand, it is as important to Servia and Greece as it is to Bulgaria herself that Adrianople should become Bulgarian. We all want Bulgaria to get her full share in return for her tremendous and heroic efforts. We are willing even that she should get a bit more than her share, provided she gets it at the expense of Turkey, not at the expense of Servia and Greece. If she is allowed Adrianople, and all of the Thracian peninsula that she claims, she will have the less excuse for pressing her demand for Saloniki, and her contention that south-eastern Macedonia, clear over to the Ochrida district, and including it, should be hers. So, as I take it, our business is, both in the negotiations and in the further struggle if the negotiations fall through, to back Bulgaria solidly in all her demands upon the Turk; and then, if she should later attempt to encroach upon our rights, to stand with equal solidity against her, and keep her in her place. We of Servia, Montenegro, and Greece—we have not driven the Turk out of Macedonia for the purpose of making Bulgaria mistress of the Balkans."

"The sooner you get that fact driven into her head the better," growled the American, exasperated that anyone should question the right of his Greeks to Saloniki.

"Right oh!" agreed Andrews.

"I fancy it's going to take all your diplomacy," murmured Madame, peering thoughtfully into the tea-pot, "to convince our Bulgarian friends that it is a fact. I

only pray it may not ask for more than diplomacy."

"If more than diplomacy *should* be needed," said Plamenac gravely, rising from his chair and standing before the fire, "we are prepared, and we shall not shrink from the issue. I have let that truth sink into the consciousness of the Government at Sofia, and I am persuaded that the knowledge will make for harmony in the final settlement."

"Poor old Gregory, I wish he could hear you say that!" said Andrews. "I remember the last time I saw him, a couple of days before the Tarabosch guns brought him down, he was a bit anxious."

"For my own part," said the Prince, "I believe to the bottom of my heart that he *does* hear, that he knows all about it, and that he is *not* anxious. As he was wont to say always, that do I say now with him, most confidently—'The hand of God is in it.'"

THE END

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